

WHAT THE FRESHET BROUGHT TO DAISY SOULE.

BY M. T. CALDOR.

"Don't stand there in the open door, child. You will take cold. How raw the air is!" And the old lady shivered a little, and edged her rocking-chair a little closer to the kitchen stove, where the teakettle was singing blithely.

"I forgot I was keeping the door open, grandmother," returned a low sweet voice. "I was listening to the river. How loud it roars!"

"Ay!" muttered the old woman, "the snows way back on the hills are melting, and the long rain has helped to swell the stream. I remember it was so at the time of the great freshet, when Uncle Joe's house was carried off, forty years ago this spring. Forty years ago!"

The girl also shivered now, and closing the door, came to the stove, and stood there restlessly for a moment, then said, resolutely:

"I am going out to look at the river, grandmother. I will protect myself carefully, and the rain has nearly ceased. I think I ought to go, for it will be dark presently, and too late then to help ourselves, if there is any danger."

"Danger of what, Daisy? What are you thinking of, child?"

The sweet young lips quivered just an instant, as Daisy returned, quietly:

"I was thinking if any danger came, grandma, we have no one to depend upon to help us out of it; and I have had an uneasy fear of another freshet hanging about me all day. I never remember hearing the river roar in that way."

The old woman put away her knitting promptly, and rising, seized an old cloak and began wrapping it around her with tremulous hands.

"Grandma," began the frightened Daisy, but paused when she saw the firm determined expression on the withered face, "you have been sick; you must not go out—"

"Hush, child! it is my duty to go with you. I oughtn't to have left it for a young thing like you to suggest. Besides, I shall know best about the danger. I remember what landmarks Uncle Joe used to warn

father must never be covered. Bring my overshoes, dear, and the cane, too; and be sure and wrap yourself well, and we will go out and see for ourselves; for you are right, there are none to look after us. Poor lone lamb! poor lone lamb! you have only your poor old granny. The Lord help you and love you, Daisy!"

The girl brushed hastily away a twinkling drop that clung to her long curving eyelash, while she brought the needed wraps; and then she gave her arm to steady the feeble form of the aged woman when together they passed out from the humble cottage door into the chilly air, under the dull gray sky across which the clearing clouds were swiftly skurrying. The snow had nearly all melted away, except that on the protected side of wall and bank. A rift of dingy white still protruded above the glassy pool of black water that surrounded it.

The river was indeed raging like a mad creature. Grandma Soule pushed away the thin locks of gray hair, and shook her head as she listened. Her granddaughter shivered again, and in her secret heart repeated dismally the old woman's words, "Poor lone lamb!" Poor and lonely indeed. She glanced across from the tall walls of the factory, on the other side of the river, to the clustering roofs of the village. Who of all the multitude there would give a thought to the poor little cot or its inmates, even if the dreaded freshet came? Through the gloom and mist she had a glimpse of the fine cupola of the grand house of the neighborhood, and she thought of Rose Gilbratthe sitting there in the luxurious parlor, smiling and happy, for all the storm and the threatening evil; smiling and happy, beloved and idolized, and she, little Daisy Soule, was out there alone with her feeble old grandmother, shivering under the storm, and trembling lest even the humble forlorn shelter that had hitherto protected them should be snatched away by the greedy white teeth of the freshet.

"Grandma," said she, abruptly, "do you know I think this is a very cruel world?"

Grandma Soule brushed away again at the gray locks fluttered over her eyes by the

wind, and looked wistfully into the pale, weary, half-defiant face.

"Bless my heart, child! what are you thinking about? The world is well enough," she returned, hastily; "it is the miserable sinful people that make the cruelty."

"You and I are a part of the people, grandma. What have we done that we are left here poor, neglected, despised, forlorn?"

There was a smothered passion in the voice.

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed Grandma Soule again; "whatever has the child been thinking of?"

"I have been thinking all day how feeble you are growing, and how helpless I am, grandma. Will they take us to the workhouse if I cannot earn enough to keep us here?"

"Do I hear a child of mine asking that question?" returned the old woman, fiercely. "To the workhouse! never! Why, Daisy, child! I have got enough in the bank to keep the wolf from our door. Have you been worrying over that, with all the rest? I have been too close-mouthed with you."

"You have—O, indeed you have, grandma!" And this time there was a sob in the girl's sweet voice. "O grandma, if you would tell me all to-night—everything about my mother—I think it would help me, even if it is a bitter story."

"It is bitter, God knows that; but, Daisy, he has tempered the wind to the shorn lamb," answered the old woman, solemnly.

"It is very bleak and cold now," murmured Daisy. "But O grandma, look! look!" cried she, in quite another voice, as they struggled on to the bank of the rushing, foaming, surging river. "The bridge is gone from the upper bank! See the timbers tearing along in the water! And what are all those people doing over on the other bank, beside the mill?"

The old woman steadied herself against the girl's shoulder, and holding up her withered hands, peered through them long and earnestly.

"They are afraid of a wild night, it is plain to see. They are strengthening the dam and the mill walls. And well they may be; the gray rock, the old boulder, is under water, and that was Uncle Joe's fatal sign. Come back to the house, my child."

"But, grandmother, will it be safe? You said Uncle Joe's was swept away—and we are helpless, all alone. Let us go over to

the village and find shelter. Somebody will take us in."

"You have not looked behind you, Daisy. Don't you see that the water has backed in from the old ditch, and that the pasture is a deep lake, and the meadow almost as wild a torrent as the river? We cannot escape from our little knoll that way, and on the river the bridge is gone."

Daisy gave a little cry of consternation.

"But I can run along the bank and shout for somebody to come with a boat. Go back, grandma, and pack a bundle, and I will find help for you."

But Grandma Soule shook her gray head.

"Who would risk their life in that boiling river to save ours? No, my child; we will return to the humble house where the Lord has set our habitation, and we will trust the God of the widow and orphan to care for us. Come, my child; though this is a south wind, its fury chills me to the bone, and I am a little faint. We must—go—back."

Daisy saw that a deadly paleness had overspread the speaker's face, and that the last words faltered from her lips. She, for, got everything else, and tenderly assisted the old woman's tottering steps till they gained the cottage again; and once there, she brought her warm drink, and chafed the purple hands, and wrapped a warm blanket about her, and kneeling down upon the floor beside her, she laid her head against the aged breast, and said, quietly:

"I am not afraid now, grandma; do not think I am. I see that it is best to wait here."

"To wait for what comes—what the Lord sends, in chastening or in comforting—either way in love. Always believe that, child. I have been hard and bitter in my day, but I have sorely repented—sorely, sorely! And now I know that love is the lighthouse that shines, shines always over the wild waters. How they roar! My ears are full of their roar."

There was a look on the wan pinched face that startled the girl.

"Grandma," she said, earnestly, "you shall not talk any more to-night. I will not ask you to say a single word. Come, lie down, and I will sit beside you." And Grandma Soule, smiling, in childlike obedience complied.

"Make up a cheery fire. Never mind if the woodbox is low, Daisy. Be sure you

have a good fire and lights shining; they may light some poor straggler," she commanded, as she rested her weary head upon the pillow. "We might have a visitor, who knows? Let us do our poor best in welcome. Fill the teapot full, Daisy."

"Yes, grandma," answered Daisy, a strange awe creeping into her heart as she glanced over to the wan face with that unwonted smile upon it.

The glittering eyes followed every movement, as the slender figure and light touch glided throughout the room setting everything in order, still full of that new glad content.

"I've been hard and bitter in my day, but I'm going to change now. I trust the Lord that all is done in love," she murmured again. "Is there a good fire, Daisy? It seems still a little chilly."

"Your hands are like ice. O grandma, you should not have gone out into the rain! How could I let you?" murmured Daisy, chafing again at the numb hands, and vaguely alarmed, without really understanding why, to see the purple rings settling around the finger nails.

"Throw on another blanket, and I shall be very comfortable. Now sit down, my darling. What was it I promised to tell you?"

"About my mother. But not to-night, grandma. Go to sleep now."

"Yes, I shall have a sweet sleep presently, but I must fulfil all my duties first. I think this was one. I have been very hard upon your mother's memory. I told you I was always hard and stern. I accused her in my heart of bringing shame upon her father's honest name. I would not allow you to know anything about it, but to-night my heart is very soft to poor Anna. I may have been mistaken; it was all very strange. She brought me her baby to keep, but she gave me no explanation, though she promised to write it. I never knew of her marriage. No one ever hinted that she was married, and I have never seen her since."

"O how cruel! how unnatural!" burst piteously from Daisy's tremulous lips; "to desert her child, even if she had brought it to a heritage of shame. To take no thought—"

"Hush! you mustn't blame her. It was all a mystery, I tell you. My Anna was once everything noble and pure. What could have changed her so? But she had

some thought. Every year a sum of money has come from an unknown source. I have used as little as possible, and the rest is in the bank—for you. Let us think kindly of her if we can, Daisy."

But Daisy's head drooped low.

"I knew it," murmured she. "I knew the quiet avoidance of all the village people meant something more than scorn for our poverty. Even Kenneth Dare was kind from pity, when Rose Gilbraith refused to sit by me at the school festival. Every one knows the story, and I was thinking of calling them to come to our rescue! O grandma, I am glad we did not try to escape the freshet!"

But Grandma Soule's mind was wandering again.

"The freshet!" muttered she. "Yes, yes; poor Uncle Joe! that was a hard time. There is Joe, and Albert, and my Gilbert—my strong brave Gilbert! How long I have borne the loneliness! I think I shall see Gilbert to-night. Have you made fresh tea and set the light in the window, Daisy? Go and look."

"Yes, yes, dear grandmother," sobbed the girl, brought back again from the contemplation of her own forlornness. "Do not look around so strangely, I am sitting by you."

"But where is the guest—the guest we are waiting for? Go and look if he is in the path."

Humoring the thought, the girl went to the window and looked out into the blackness. Her light flared out upon a pool of water, and the hoarser roar of the river came mingled with the sound of crushing timbers and whirling trees. She shuddered under the knowledge that the ground around was all submerged, but came back with a brave face.

"I see no one yet, grandma. Let me put a warm stone to your feet, they are so cold. If you would only go to sleep—"

But when the fluttering eyelids dropped at length, overcome by drowsiness, the silence was more intolerable than the anxiety had been. She stole once more to the door, and found the sill hardly holding back a dull swash of surging water.

"The expected guest!" murmured she, with a strange numbness of heart; "is it death? And will any one grieve to learn that we were carried away?"

And she went back and replenished the

fire, and trimmed the lights to burn more brightly; then sat down again by the bedside, and went over the brief hints of the miserable story, and drooped her head, and wondered if her young heart could ever echo the old woman's trust that love ruled everyway and everywhere.

And then she thought again of Rose Gilbraith, beautiful, merry, beloved Rose Gilbraith, in the happy security of her loving home. Would Kenneth Dare sometime respond to the coquettish lures she herself had seen the brilliant heiress spread forth in the path of the handsome artist? She pictured a grand bridal, and lingered over every slightest item. How lovely Rose would look in flowing white, with orange flowers in her hair, and a bridal veil's fairy mist about her! How proudly would Kenneth smile down upon her from his regal height! And little Daisy, who had scarcely a right to the honest name of the poor old grandmother, would be floating, floating far off on the tumultuous waters.

It was not she who shivered, but Grandma Soule, who sprang up in the end of the bed, and cried out loudly:

"Who is calling me? Are you coming, Gilbert? But what a terrible uproar of waters! Daisy, child, are you there? Go to the door."

"There is no one there, dear grandma, only the waters of the freshet. If the foundations stand we are safer here than anywhere we can reach."

"I tell you some one is calling; go and see." And simply to soothe the fevered excitement of the wandering brain, Daisy took the lamp and went, the chilly water splashing over her feet as she walked.

She stared like one in a maze, when a shout of glad relief sounded in her ears, and a dark figure came staggering against the doorway.

"Daisy! Daisy! thank Heaven I have reached you at last! You are unharmed as yet."

"Kenneth Dare!" faltered Daisy.

"Yes, of course. I started to help you long before dark, but a timber crushed my boat, and I had to swim ashore and find a second, and that was swamped in the current; and but for your lighted windows I think I must have perished. Everything is wild and strange outside, and you would think yourself afloat on a strange ocean. Have you been frightened, my darling?"

And the tall broad-shouldered man was shaking off the wet, and then seizing upon her passive hands.

"You came to save me! You thought of us!" repeated Daisy, in that same tone of wild amaze.

"Of course I did. One could see the danger to which this cottage is exposed, and the horror of the thought showed me what I had hardly realized before—that it held my pearl of price. Daisy, my darling, my precious, have you not seen how I loved you?"

All the girl's sweet face was aglow with a kindling rapture, that for a moment flushed its pallor into a rosy hue.

"A royal guest indeed!" she murmured. "O, it was well that I lighted all our lamps! Come in, Kenneth, and hear my grandmother's story, before you ask for any answer."

But Grandina Soule was talking swiftly and incoherently about Uncle Joe and going to meet Gilbert, and did not heed Daisy's announcement of the kind friend who had appeared to succor them.

She bowed, and smiled, and said:

"A wedding guest? Give him welcome, Daisy; but I must attend to Gilbert."

The young man turned impulsively to the trembling girl.

"O Daisy! Daisy! how thankful I am I have reached you! Do you know, do you see that she is wandering in mind?—dying also, I fear."

"Before the waters come that shall swallow us all," murmured Daisy. "But I am not frightened or grieved. Nothing, I think, can frighten me now, even though we are all swept away."

"None of us shall be swept away. I shall prepare a raft in readiness for emergency; but I have strong faith in these foundations, and believe the house will stand, since it has survived the first shock. Have you no quieting medicine to give her?"

Daisy's thoughts were swift and clear now. How could she have forgotten the powder she had brought from the doctor's herself a month or so ago! She found it, mixed it, and coaxed her patient to swallow the draught; and was rewarded by seeing the wild eyes veiled by the fallen lids.

She was sitting down by the bedside with a calm sweet face, when Kenneth Dare returned from his exploring expedition, lantern in hand, dripping like a young sea-god,

and in Daisy's eyes far more handsome and noble-looking.

He smiled bravely and reassuringly.

"Have no fear, Daisy. I have turned the water from sweeping with full strength against these walls. Besides, something has changed the current, and dammed it up above there. I should not be surprised if the crash I heard a little time since was Gibraltar's mill; and in that case, the larger stream would pass on the other side. I have prepared a raft, and set a mark to see if the waters rise any higher. How is the dear old grandmother?"

"Asleep. Ah, how kind you are to me! Will you take a cup of hot tea? You must surely need it, cold and wet as you are."

"Thanks. It will be all the more refreshing from your hands. Daisy, tell me first that you guessed something of my love for you." And he detained the little brown hand reaching for the teacup.

She hung her graceful head as she faltered:

"How could I, knowing my own obscurity and humiliating surroundings? Did you ever hear the story, Kenneth?"

"I would never listen to the evil gossip of the town. It was enough for me to know your grandmother and you, my sweet Daisy blossom," he answered, fearlessly.

How her eyes shone!

"A glorious guest, truly!" murmured she again. "My grandmother was right; love watches over us, even in the storm."

"And the storm is abating," declared he, cheerily, when he had taken his tea and gone again upon an investigating tour. "The course of the torrent is certainly turned, and the water is sinking here, instead of rising higher. Please Heaven, I think I can say confidently that this house is safe!"

They sat down beside the bedside of the peacefully-sleeping grandmother, and the hours of the night, that Daisy had believed would prove so terrible and dreary, glided calmly away, and morning broke over a wild waste of ruin all about them, but in safety and peace for them. Ay, in safety and peace also for the dear old grandmother; for almost as soon as daylight rendered any attempt at passage possible, a boat, manned by strong men, found its way in among the floating debris, and out across the wide wastes of eddying waters until the cottage was reached, when a strange gentleman,

carrying a pale beautiful woman in his arms, leaped across the threshold, crying, eagerly:

"My daughter—Daisy, my child, are you safe?" And the beautiful woman flung her arms about the startled girl, sobbing:

"O my deserted darling! my firstborn! my treasure! for whom this aching heart has sighed so long! You are safe! Heaven be praised! All night long I have prayed upon my knees for your safety, and the prayer was heard. And my dear, dear mother, lead me to her, Daisy. All our trials are ended at last. There is to be no more secrecy, no hiding of our precious child."

"It is Anna's voice!" cried feeble tones from the bedside. "She has come to explain everything." And there was Grandmother Soule, rational, smiling, happy, although pallid as a marble statue.

The lady fell down beside the bed, covering the cold white hands with tears and kisses.

"All is to be explained. O my mother, you have been cruelly wronged, and we never knew it until a few weeks since. I sent you a letter explaining the whole story of my secret marriage, and the discovery that its revelation would lose my husband the fortune he depended upon. I asked you to take my child, and conceal the truth for a little time. It was my husband's mother who withheld the letter, fearing to trust you with the momentous secret. It was she who deceived me all the time into the belief that you acquiesced cheerfully. It was she who compelled us to bear this cruel separation from our child for all these years, lest my husband's uncle should discover that we had disobeyed and deceived him, and so withhold his fortune. Bitterly enough have we repented, but the wretched trial is ended. The uncle is dead. We have only just returned from a foreign land and its ten years' exile. We have come to reward you, to claim our child."

An angelic smile passed over the withered features. A glad rapture lighted the glazing eyes.

"It is all in love—all in love. I told you so, Daisy," were Grandma Soule's last words. And she sank softly back upon the pillows, gave a low gurgling sigh, and was carried out upon the eternal river to endless peace.

Who could weep bitterly over such a

death? Daisy, leaning upon Kenneth Dare's arm, following behind the loving parents who had come to carry her to a home of wealth and refinement, entered the disordered village that noon just in season to see a weeping cortege bearing away a dark-robed graceful figure stretched stiffly upon a rudely-improvised bier.

"Have you heard the sad news?" asked a stander-by. "Miss Gilbraith rode down to the river to watch the swollen stream, and was caught by the sudden rush and whirlpool made when her father's mills went down. Horse and rider went down with the debris, and they have just found the body, and are taking it home. It is so melancholy—that lovely graceful Rose!

And yet perhaps it is well for her, for her father is ruined, and he seems like one distracted."

Daisy's cheek could not grow paler than it was after her night of anguish and relief, her morning of tender sorrow and holy thankfulness; but the swift tears rose to her eyes, and she bent her head in penitential remorse for the envious thoughts that had poisoned her mind so brief a time before.

"Let me keep fast to dear grandmother's lesson," was her thought, "that in cloud or sunshine, joy or woe, safety or peril, a loving care is ever around, underneath and about us. Behold what even the freshest has brought to me!"

WHY I MARRIED THE WIDOW.

BY N. P. DARLING.

I ALWAYS did like the Widow Beasley. I liked her before she was married (her maiden name was Brown), and I liked her after she was married; and when Dan Beasley died, I liked her so much that when she advertised for boarders, I was the very first man to apply, and consequently I got the very best room in the house.

Mrs. Beasley is a most decidedly good-looking woman. I always said so, and I always thought so, and I still continue to think so. She wasn't one of your small, pinched-up, wasp-waisted creatures. O no. Elizabeth—that was her Christian name—had a form of very handsome proportions. She had bewitching eyes, a shade or two darker than the oft-quoted raven's wing, and the most splendid purple-black hair I think that I ever saw. Her skin, though, was not so white as I like to see skins, but as she had a pair of very brilliant red roses in her cheeks, I never cared much about the absence of the lilies. Her lips, I must say, were about the most ravishing pair that I ever had pressed to mine (for I won't deny that I have kissed Elizabeth), and her teeth—But, pshaw! shall I make out an inventory of her charms? beginning thus: "Item, 'She hath a sweet mouth.'"

No, it is sufficient to say that she was most decidedly lovely—

"And thro' her clear brunette complexion shone a Great wish to please—a most attractive dower, Especially when added to the power."

And the widow did please me. In fact, I had always been pleased with Elizabeth, but I had no more thought of loving her than you have, my gentle masculine reader, for, in the first place, she was five years my senior; and in the second place, I was terribly in love with another woman; and in the third place, the other woman was terribly in love with me.

I don't know whether you know me or not, but you've probably seen me if you've ever been to Yazoo. I'm always to be seen in Yazoo when the weather is fair. My name is Washington Wadman. It was my great-grandfather's notion having me

christened after the "father of his country," for, you see, my great-grandfather was one of George's most intimate friends. They used to go "hooking" watermelons together, as I've heard my great-grandfather tell many and many a time. I am happy to state that the old gentleman still lives at the rather mature age of one hundred and forty, is as hearty as ever, and can read Chinese without glasses just as well as ever he could.

I haven't any profession, and as my uncle John Wadman left me all his wealth at the time of his death, I don't really need one.

Yes, my Uncle John left me all his property upon one condition; and as the condition wasn't a very disagreeable one, I have always, since my uncle's death, considered myself a man of wealth, although the above-mentioned condition was not fulfilled until yesterday.

To understand my uncle's reasons for making such a singular will as he left behind him, it is necessary for me to inform you that he was a bachelor, and knew all about the discomforts of a bachelor's life; but as he didn't begin to realize all these discomforts until he became too old—as he thought—to marry, he began to hate himself for not marrying while he was young. And he extended his hate to every other old bachelor, not excepting his brothers, who, with the exception of my father, were bachelors also. So you see he left his property to me, provided I married before my twenty-fifth birthday. But in case I did not marry, thus forfeiting the property, it was to be equally divided between six old maids who all their lives had been willing and anxious to marry, but had never had a chance.

Now the reader will naturally suppose that I wasn't fool enough to throw away a fortune just for the want of a wife, particularly as I happened to be in love with—

"A beautiful and happy girl,
With step as light as summer air,"

who loved me in return, and had already promised to be Mrs. Wadman.

No, I had determined to marry, and for fear that something might happen to my darling Fanny, I had *partially* courted several other girls, and I won't deny that I had thrown one or two very tender glances at the Widow Beasley.

But the girl that I adored was sweet Fanny Cordwell. Yes,

"She ruled in beauty o'er this heart of mine,"

as Petrarch said about a certain Mrs. Laura (I wonder how Mrs. L.'s husband liked that style of poetry?), and she was calculating to rule my household.

I've given you some slight hints regarding Mrs. Beasley's beauty, and as I have admitted that I admired her, you may imagine that Fanny's beauty was of a similar order, but you never were more mistaken in your life. I don't confine myself to admiring one particular type of female loveliness, madam. No, I admire your magnificent Juno-like woman, be she light or dark, and I admire round, rosy, laughing-eyed women, and tall, thin, sober-eyed women, and short, thick, puffy women. But I *love* a small angelic creature, with great blue eyes, golden hair, and a complexion "like roseleaves swimming in pure milk," and her name is Fanny, and she's only seventeen years old.

It is a sad mistake on somebody's part that Fanny wasn't born several years before she was, because, it was on account of her youth that her mother persisted in fixing upon the very last day that my uncle's will allowed for our wedding.

Yesterday was the day appointed for our wedding. For weeks and months we had been making preparations for that great day. I can't say that Fanny and I busied ourselves much about the preparations, for there was nothing that we could do except to sit in the drawing-room and talk about how happy we should be when the time came; for she did love me so, and I loved her so, that we were both very unhappy the moment we were out of sight of each other.

Well, the night before last being the very last night, as a bachelor, that I should pass on earth, I spent in the following manner: from seven o'clock in the evening until ten, I was with Fanny. We sat on the sofa together. I had one arm around her waist, and she had one arm around my neck, and one of her little white hands

was in mine; and her beautiful head was on my shoulder, and her golden hair swept my cheek. We talked—O, about so many things, and we said ever so many loving things, and we kissed once or twice, or perhaps twice and a half. Then the little clock on the mantel (it's a small clock, but it will go the fastest when you don't want it to, of any clock I ever saw) struck ten, and then I tore myself away from Fanny and went home.

It was just fifteen minutes past ten when I got to the widow's. I went in and found that very charming woman sitting at the piano and singing, "Thou art so near, and yet so far." When I entered the room she looked up at me so longingly that I, really—well, I wished there was more of me—two or three, for instance. Then we sang "Auld Lang Syne," and a tear bubbled up in the widow's right eye, and rolled slowly and sorrowfully adown her decidedly handsome nose.

"Wash," said Elizabeth (she always called me Wash), raising her dark eyes to mine, the long beautiful lashes still wet with a pearly tear or two, "Wash, I suppose this is the last night you will ever pass under my roof."

"I am thinking you are quite correct in your supposition, Elizabeth," I answered, choking down a sigh; for I was feeling rather blissfully melancholy, and the tones of Elizabeth's voice somewhat aggravated that feeling. She had a remarkably melodious voice. As the poet says:

"Those silver sounds, so soft, so dear,
The listener held his breath to hear."

Yes, I always held my breath when Elizabeth spoke, and once or twice I got so red in the face with holding on, that I had to ask her to pause and allow me to breathe.

"Wash, I—I hope you will be happy."

"Yes, Elizabeth, I rather hope so," I said, laying my hand very gently on her shoulder.

"But she's very young."

"Yes, but she'll outgrow that, Elizabeth. For the present, it is enough for me to know that she loves me as fondly as I do her."

"I shall be satisfied if she only makes you happy, Washington. But remember, no matter what may happen, I shall always be interested in you. I shall always re-re-remain your—your friend," sobbed Eliza-

beth, burying her face in the finger-board of the piano with a discordant crash, and bursting into tears.

Gentle reader, this was becoming decidedly affecting; and although I'm rather fond of affecting scenes, I objected very strongly to having one that night—the night before my wedding—in company with such a very charming woman as Mrs. Elizabeth Beasley, because I was afraid I might forget myself. So I hurriedly bade her good-night, and sought my chamber, leaving the widow to dry her tears with the pedal of the piano.

Now you, my dear fellow, I dare say did not sleep a wink the night before you were married, but I did. I am not of a nervous temperament, and I had a clear conscience. I was at peace with all the world. I was supremely happy, and had eaten a light supper, consisting of a slice of cold ham with mustard, an oyster stew, some cold boiled cabbage and beef, with a few turnips, carrots, beets, and a spoonful of squash, a slice of dry toast and a cup of tea. So you see there was nothing to hinder my sleeping; and consequently, the moment my head touched the pillow my eyes closed, and I floated off to the land of dreams.

"'Tis morn—the orange-mantled sun
Breaks through the fading gray."

I start from my sleep and rub my eyes. My brain is confused, and I stare wildly around me. There is a sickening odor in the room. What is it? Where am I? Is this my wedding-day? I cannot collect my scattered thoughts. Do I dream still? No, this is my chamber, and that is the widow's melodious voice that I hear in the hall below. Presently there is a knock at the door.

"Who's there?"

"Me—Elizabeth. O Washington, we've been robbed!"

I arose, partially dressed myself, threw on my dressing-gown, and opened the door. Elizabeth gave one fearful glance at me, screamed, and, turning quickly, rushed down stairs.

I followed her, wondering what could be the matter. In the hall I encountered Smith, one of the widow's boarders. He looked at me, and turned pale as death.

"It's one of the burglars!" he cried. And then, with a howl of terror, he burst

into the dining-room, and throwing himself from a window, ran down the street screaming "Murder!"

"Egad!" said I, "they're playing a game on me. But they'll have to play it without my assistance. I'll go back to my room and dress."

But I had just reached the foot of the stairs when the widow put her head in at the front door. She drew back screaming.

"Come, come!" said I. "This thing is played out."

"It's his voice," said the widow, her face once more appearing at the door.

"Whose voice should I have but my own?" I asked, rather testily.

"It's his nose!"

Then she came forward and took me by the hand.

"O Washington!" she cried, beginning to sob, "where—where is your hair?"

Smith, Jones and Jencks came in just then.

"It is he!" said Smith.

"Yes, it's he!" said Jones.

"I'm sure of that nose," said Jencks.

"But where's his hair?"

At that instant the cook came up and grasped me by the arm.

"O Mr. Wadman, where's your hair?"

"You think you're wonderful funny," said I, with a sneer, and a comprehensive glance that took in the widow, Smith, Jones, Jencks and the cook. "Yes, you think you're playing a nice joke on me, don't you? And I suppose you consider your conduct quite lady-like, madam? And you, Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones and Mr. Jencks, are a trio of perfect gentlemen, no doubt, but I don't think so."

"Why, the man's crazy!" cried Jones.

"Mad as a March hare!" exclaimed Jencks.

"He really thinks he has got a head of—"

But Smith was interrupted by the entrance of my old friend Woodard, who advanced toward me with a very serious cast of countenance, and placing his mouth to my ear, asked, in a very sorrowful tone of voice:

"O Wadman! where the deuce is your hair?"

"Et tu, Brute?" I cried, tearing myself away from him. And then bounding up stairs, I rushed into my room.

"Am I mad?" I asked myself, "or are they crazy? My head does feel queer;

rather light and airy—decidedly cool, too." I raised my hand to it. "Good heavens! where is my hair?"

Then I ran to the mirror. The sight was too terrible, for my head had been shaved clean, and my face had been painted with iodine. I screamed and fainted.

When I awoke to consciousness I found myself reclining in the widow's arms, with my shaved head pillowed upon her breast. All the boarders, the cook, the chamber-maids and the waiting-maids were gathered around me.

"O horrible!" I groaned. "O Elizabeth, do tell me the meaning of this?" And I placed my hands upon my head.

"Tell him," said the widow. "I can't."

"Why, you see, Wadman," began Smith, "the house was entered last night by burglars. They took all Mrs. Beasley's silver ware, and everything else of value that they could lay their hands on to. They took my gold watch, confound 'em! and all my money; and we suppose that, just for the fun of the thing, they gave you chloroform—the scent of it is all through the house—and then shaved your head and painted your face with iodine."

"And—O heavens!—this is my wedding-day!" And again I swooned.

When I again opened my eyes the company had retired, all excepting Woodard and the widow, who still supported my unprotected poll.

"'Twas a fiendish outrage!" said the widow.

"Yes," I faltered, "it would have been horrible under any circumstances, but at present how much more so, on this my wedding-day!"

"The wedding'll have to be postponed," said Woodard. "I'll go to Mrs. Cordwell's immediately, and tell her what has happened."

"No, no. I'll go myself," I cried, starting up.

"What! with that head and face?"

"It's the only head and face I've got to go with; and the wedding can't be postponed. Do you remember my uncle's will?"

"Unfortunate man! I had forgotten the will. Yes, the wedding must take place to-day. But will Fanny—"

"Do you think the dear girl fell in love with my hair?" I asked, savagely.

"Go and see," said the widow, leaving the room.

I dressed hurriedly with my friend's assistance, and jamming my hat over my eyes, was about to leave the apartment when Woodard stopped me with the question, "Hadn't I better get you a wig?"

"No, I'll go to my Fanny as I am. Remember, 'Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.'" And so saying, I strode out of the house and walked proudly down the street, conscious of the fact, but too savage to care if hundreds of eyes were looking at me.

Yes, there were heads at every window, for the news of the horrible outrage had spread from one end of Yazoo to the other, and Fanny had been one of the first to hear of it.

When I reached Mrs. Cordwell's door I tarried not to ring the bell, for that had long ceased to be customary with me. No, I marched boldly into the house and entered the drawing-room unannounced. Fanny stood before me, but she did not speak, she did not move.

"You might have thought a form of wax,
Wrought to the very life, was there,
So still she was, so pale, so fair."

"O Fanny, darling, speak to me!" I cried, extending my arms to embrace her.

Then she started, she shrieked. Her mother rushed into the room and caught her daughter in her arms, and then they both screamed in concert.

"O Fanny, dearest, don't yell so! My hair will grow again, and my face will resume its original color, before our honeymoon is over," I pleaded.

"Go! go!" she screamed. "I can't marry such a fright. Go, and let your hair grow if it will."

"But we must be married to-day, dearest," I urged.

She gave one very scrutinizing glance at my face and at my hairless cranium; and then she covered her face with her hands.

"No, no, I—I really can't marry you to-day. I—" she took one more peep at my shaved head—"I renounce you forever. Adieu."

Then she left the room, and I left the house. Returning slowly to my boarding-house, I met Elizabeth at the door. A world of pity beamed in her dark eyes.

"Is the wedding postponed?" she asked, observing my sorrowful countenance.

"Yes—worse. She has discarded me

altogether. No woman will marry me now, and to-morrow I shall be a poor man," I answered, jamming my head against the door in a rage.

"Are you sure that no woman will marry you, Washington?" Elizabeth asked; and her melodious voice was more musical than ever.

I looked down into her beautiful dark eyes. My heart gave one terrible thump as I asked:

"Will you?"

"Yes, Washington."

I pressed her to my heart, and she kissed my shaved head.

"The wedding shall take place this afternoon," I said.

"Yes, love."

Again we embraced.

And now the reader knows why I married the widow. And although I've only been married twenty-four hours, I've thought several times since the ceremony was performed, what a fool I was not to have married her long ago, and *in my hair*, without the fear of my uncle's will before me.

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XI.

"I SHALL WAIT, EVERIL."

It is the twenty-fifth of May. Only two days wanting to the one on which Miss West-Norman comes of age; and two people at least—namely, herself and Captain Staunton—are ruminating on the fact. It is a warm sultry afternoon, and they are seated, side by side, on a green knoll that overlooks the park, and under the young tender shade of some newly-clothed beech trees that screen it from the observation of the house. Both are silent. He is doing little else than pluck the blades of grass that grow within his reach and scatter them again, whistling in a low tone as he does so, and raising his large dark eyes every now and then to seek the face of his companion; whilst she is evidently dreaming—of the future, may-be, or the past—and though apparently unmindful of her lover's pleading glances, with the contented restful expression on her countenance, which is so often to be seen upon that of a woman who sits silent but happy in the presence of the man whom she loves best. It is true that Maurice Staunton has never actually spoken to her of marriage; but he has told her, by looks, and words, and actions, that he loves her; he has even drawn from her the confession that she loves him in return; and Everil has not the slightest doubt but that it is a settled thing between them, and when the proper time comes to speak, he will formally propose for her hand. Were it not for this formidable decision respecting the earl that she is called upon to make, she sees no reason why anything further should ever be said upon the subject which lies nearest to their hearts—except, indeed, to fix the wedding-day. For the lovers of the present century are not in their manners a bit like the priggish, prudish forefathers we have laid quietly to rest in the family vault. Kneeling is absurd; letters are compromising; and very few of them would get through a formal proposal without laughing. A few long looks serve to pave the way for their intentions; a few warm whispers break the ice; and then

some day, when the looks and the whispers have been somewhat longer and warmer than usual, by pure accident the lips come together, and the hurried question, "Do you like me well enough to marry me?" settles the business, as thoroughly as ever their grandfathers did after scraping, and bowing, and blushing through a couple of agonizing hours.

I wonder how many women married within the last half century have been formally proposed to. The elegance of language and of diction for which the Sir Charles Grandisons of the eighteenth century were famous has been entirely relegated to the servants' hall, where it makes its appearance between the covers of the "The Complete Letter-writer," and serves to convey the tender aspirations of Jeames to the longing ears of Mary. But Lady Blanche and Lord Ronald, up in the drawing-room, do not take half that trouble. He squeezes her hand one day, rather more fervently than etiquette demands; and when she pouts and says he has no "right to do it," he tells her to give him the right. "You seem to have taken it already," replies her ladyship, with a smile that tries hard to be a frown. Whereupon his lordship claims several other rights of a more impressive nature, and has put the engagement ring on her finger before Jeames has transcribed half of the love-letter which he is writing so carefully at spare moments in his pantry.

So Everil West-Norman believes that, as far as she and Maurice Staunton are concerned, all has been said that need be said between them—only sometimes she hopes he will speak more plainly to her before the twenty-seventh. She is not situated like other girls—she cannot indefinitely prolong the blissful present; besides, when she publicly announces her determination not to marry Lord Valence, she may be subjected by her anxious guardians to a closer questioning than will be agreeable. And added to this, though Agatha has assured her that Maurice is fully informed of all the conditions of her father's will, Everil does not entirely trust Agatha, and foresees the awkwardness of the situation, should

Captain Staunton speak to her guardian—before he is entirely cognizant of the responsibility he will take upon himself in marrying her. It is this of which she is dreaming, as she sits quiet and absorbed, gazing with her beautiful eyes across the spacious park. She wishes Maurice would speak more definitely, though she almost feels disloyal to her lover's faith in wishing so; but she cannot be the first to moot the subject; it would look so much like asking him if he really meant to marry her. She has thought several times lately that he wished to put the question point-blank; she feels that, at any rate, it cannot be much longer delayed—perhaps it is coming even to-day; and as she thinks so, she trembles at the near approach of what she wishes. The silence between them has been long unbroken. As Everil muses, she feels that Staunton's eyes are on her face, and the conscious blood rises beneath his gaze. He seems to answer her very thoughts:

"Miss West-Norman!—Everil!—may I speak to you?"

She has been expecting it so long and patiently; yet now that it comes, it falls upon her like a shock.

She starts and colors, and is all agitation.

"Of what? I do not know! We have been out here so long, Captain Staunton, I really think we ought to go in."

"No! no!—not yet!" he urges, as he gains possession of her hand. "You have been so good to me, Everil!—you have let me read so plainly the secret of your heart, that it emboldens me to ask for it!"

"O, stop! pray stop!" she cries, a sudden unaccountable terror taking hold of her lest he should speak too soon. "Captain Staunton, I have so much to tell you!"

"And I have so much to tell you, also, my dearest!" he says passionately, as he seizes hold of her dress and tries to detain her. But she breaks from him quickly, and stands at a little distance, heated and trembling. At that moment her name is heard ringing out from the house.

"Hark!—they are calling me! I am wanted!—I must go!" she says, in her anxiety to run away anywhere for a few minutes and hide the agitation that is mastering her.

"O, very well; pray go!" he answers, in a quick tone of offence. "Their business, whatever it may be, is doubtless more important than mine."

At that she stands still, and regards him sorrowfully.

"It is not that, Maurice—you must know it; but—but—I have a great deal to say to you, and it were better we were undisturbed. Let me have a few minutes to see what they want of me—and—and—to collect myself—and I will return to you here."

By this time he has risen, and stands beside her.

"My love!" he utters fondly, as he looks into her blushing face, "and how long am I to wait for you?—the moments will seem hours till you come back, Everil."

"I know what you would tell me," she whispers; "and I want to gather strength to bear it, Maurice."

His answer is a kiss. He has thrown his arm about her, and he draws her face close to his, and kisses her upon the lips. She does not stir or speak. She believes the marriage of their lips is but the forerunner of a higher, holier union, and she resigns herself to the happiness of feeling she is his. But when he releases her she is as pale as death, and the step with which she leaves him falters. She cannot find who called her from the portico. She thinks it must have been Agatha; but all the lower part of the house is empty, and there is no appearance of the widow to be seen.

Miss West-Norman toils mechanically up the stairs. Now that she has left her lover, she wishes with all a woman's perversity of judgment that she had not done so. What a simpleton he must think her, to run away at the most important crisis of her life! Still she is thankful for these few moments of quietude in which to assume the dignity befitting the occasion. She penetrates Mrs. West's own apartment, but it is vacant; and then she looks into that occupied by Lord Valence, which is next to it, and of which the door stands open. That also is empty—there is no necessity for her to enter, in order to assure herself of the fact; but his writing-table stands near the open window, and the loose papers with which it is covered, are fluttering about. Instinctively, with a woman's love of order, Everil advances to replace them, although her thoughts are all by that green knoll overlooking the park, to which she hesitates to return because she so much longs to do so. She gathers up the scattered manuscripts rapidly and energetically, and piles them on Lord Valence's desk. As she does so,

the large scrawling writing on the topmost paper catches her eye; the letters are so bold she cannot avoid seeing them. As she reads their purport, she changes color, and her breast heaves.

"Everil West-Norman will marry you, and she will love you; though not yet. But have patience! The fruit that is longest in ripening is sweetest when it is ripe."

The heiress, with eyes glowing more angrily each time they light upon the characters, peruses this sentence three or four times; she turns the paper over and over, as though she would find out with whom it had originated; and when she has fully mastered its meaning, and the fact that it is anonymous, her fury is without bounds.

"Well!" with set teeth and hurried breathing, "I call this a very delicate, gentlemanly thing for Valence to do—to discuss the probabilities of my marriage with him (on which he would not even allow me to speak the other morning) with some of his vulgar farmer friends up in Ireland. Look at this handwriting. Who but an illiterate clod could ever form such scrawling ungainly letters? But if it were a duke it would be the same thing.

"Everil West-Norman will marry you, and she will love you, though not yet." I never heard such a piece of impertinence in all my life! Who is this fellow who dares to anticipate my decision, and to communicate his ideas to Valence? What respect can Valence have for me, that he can allow my probable actions in so delicate a manner to be discussed by a stranger? And the creature writes as confidently as though he were an indisputable authority on the subject.

"Everil West-Norman will marry you." O, will she, my unknown friend? She would just as soon marry you, who have evidently not attained the first elements of knowledge.

"And she will love you, though not yet." Never! If I had ever entertained the least idea (which I never have) that it might ever be in the remotest manner possible (which it never could be) I should arrive at the faintest imitation of love for my cousin, this unparalleled piece of impertinence on his part would have convinced me to the contrary. I knew he was a hypochondriac, and had softening of the brain, or something very much like it, and was a most dull and uninteresting companion; but I

did think—yes, I *did* think—that my own father's own brother's son was a gentleman. But to care so little for my feelings, my dignity, the false position in which I am placed—to care, in fact, so little for myself as to let his bumpkin friends write of me in this familiar style to him, it is abominable—not to be endured by any woman.

"Marry him! I never meant to marry him. Nothing on earth should have induced me to do it, as I have said from the very beginning; but after this I'd see him at the bottom of the sea first. Let him take my money!"—at this remembrance great hot tears, like heatdrops after thunder, commence to gather in her beautiful angry eyes—"it's all he wants, the avaricious mercenary creature!—and squander it upon his loutish companions, who don't even know how to write; but myself—I would die sooner. O! I will go back and tell it all to Maurice. He will feel for me; he will sympathize with me. These insults are not things that we can bear alone!"

She turns to leave the room as she speaks, first crumpling up the offending paper in her hands.

"I will tear it all in little pieces. I will not have my name lying about for any one to read and comment on. No! I will keep it, and when I am far beyond his reach, I will send it back to Valence, and tell him to inform his friend how I despise them both for their want of judgment and delicacy."

So saying, she thrusts the paper into her bosom, and runs back to join her lover. She has no fear lest he should think her too ready to admit his advances now. Her pride has been wounded by the discovery she has made, and she flies to Staunton as to a friend in whom she may confide, and from whom she is sure to derive comfort and sympathy. She reaches the grassy knoll breathless and heated.

"How cruel to keep me waiting so long!" he exclaims, as he rises to meet her. "Do you think I am made of iron, Everil, to be able to endure such suspense? I was very nearly following you to the house."

"I am so glad you didn't, for I want to have a long talk with you; and here we shall be undisturbed. Maurice, are you really my friend?"

"Can you doubt it?" he says tenderly, as he draws her down beside him and encircles her figure with his arm.

"I so much want a friend," she answered, as she reclines against him with half-closed eyes. "Everybody professes to be so; but I look all around me, and am not sure who is true. Guardy says he loves me, but he is always urging me to act against my own conscience and inclinations. Miss Strong sides with him, and Alice stands neutral, and will give me no advice whatever. I think of all here Agatha is my best friend, for she knows my wishes, and tells me to follow them. Yet Agatha does not understand me fully. She doubts my strength of purpose and knowledge of myself."

"I doubt neither, Everil," whispers Captain Staunton.

"I believe it, Maurice; and therefore it is that I want to speak openly to you. O, I have been so insulted! I have been in such a rage. I could scarcely have credited it of him."

"Who has dared to insult you?" demands her companion, loudly, rousing up, as all Englishmen do, at such a supposition.

"Hush! it is nothing of which you can take notice. I shall have my revenge of him another way. You have heard the conditions of my father's will, Maurice?"

"I believe I have. Mrs. West was good enough to have some conversation with me one day respecting it. You must not think I was inquisitive or impertinent, dearest; but your cousin had guessed my presumption in loving you, and thought, in the kindness of her heart, I had better be made acquainted with the plain facts of the case, else I had never dared, in those days, even to hope that you might return my affection."

"And she told you everything, and yet you love me! O Maurice, I am so thankful I could not have borne that you should seek me for anything beside myself."

"How could you dream I would, Everil?"—with some show of indignation.

"Agatha told me it was so," the girl goes on dreamily; "but I could scarcely believe it. I suppose it was too good to appear true. But come, now, what *did* she tell you?"

"She assured me there was no actual engagement between Lord Valence and you."

"She is right. Of course there is no engagement. My decision is not even to be asked till the day after to-morrow."

"And what will it be then, Everil?"

"You know!"—with a sweet shy blush.

"But go on. What more?"

"She said that, in the event of your not

marrying your cousin, a portion of your money would lapse to his estate."

"A portion?"—raising herself to look him in the face as she speaks. "O no; not a portion. All?"

At this announcement Captain Staunton looks staggered.

"All? Your whole fortune?"

"Every halfpenny. Did not Agatha tell you so? She knows it as well as I do. By my father's will, in the event of my refusing to marry my cousin, the whole of my thirty thousand a year, (with the exception of a few hundreds barely sufficient to support myself) goes to his estate. This is the reason they are all so anxious to persuade me to marry him."

"But Lord Valence would never accept such a sacrifice on your part. It would be the most unparalleled act of knavery I ever heard of in my life."

"He has no alternative—or, rather, he has no option of choice. If he does not take it, the property is to be vested in the funds of some state charities. My father instituted this clause, of course, in order to force my cousin to accept his conditions."

"Robbing his own child, in fact, to benefit another! I never heard of such an iniquitous proceeding in the whole course of my existence," says Captain Staunton, hotly, as he rises to pace up and down the grass before her.

"He thought I should certainly elect to marry my cousin," interposes Everil, in a depressed voice.

"And if you do marry him, what becomes of your fortune then?"

"It remains, as it is, now, in my own hands, until my death."

"With the power to will it away?"

"Under certain conditions—or, at least, a part of it. But why talk of that now? It will never come to pass, although, I suppose, my poor father thought he would secure my happiness by the arrangement."

"By giving you the alternatives of beggary or slavery! To be sent forth on the world poor and unprotected, or to be tied for life to a sickly misanthrope like Lord Valence! Why, the man looks as if a feather would knock him down."

"That is not his fault," she interposes, quick, like most of her sex, to take the part of the weaker side. "Health is not of our own seeking; and I suppose my father hoped he would be strong; Valence had a

long conversation with me on this subject the other morning. He told me—but I forgot; it was in confidence."

"And under the circumstances, there is, of course, every reason for you to respect his lordship's secret," says Staunton, sarcastically.

"O, please don't speak like that to me! I am so low-spirited already. Only—"

"Perhaps I can guess the subject of the earl's disclosure, if it respected his health. His sister-in-law has already informed me that he is not likely to live long."

"Has she? Then I need lay no further restraint on myself. Yes; it is true—or, at least, he said so—that he has some secret complaint or other that will kill him in a few months at farthest. It is very sad. I hardly liked to look at him whilst he was speaking; but he was quite in earnest. He would not let me allude to the decision I am called upon to make, else I would have told him at once that it cannot be, and that I shall never marry him."

"But why not?" demands Staunton, as he stops before her.

"Why not?" The girl's heart seems almost to stop beating as she repeats his question, and gazes up into his handsome frowning face with wild puzzled eyes. "Why not?"

"I repeat it—why not? It seems to me you have no alternative. It would be simple madness to give up your fortune."

"And you would advise me to marry Valence!—you, who—"

But here indignation and bitter disappointment check her utterance. Maurice Staunton sits down again beside her, and takes her hand.

"I know what you would say, Everil—you, who love me. Yes! it is hard, God knows, for me, who love you, to give you such advice; but it is because I love you that I give it."

"I do not understand—"

"Everil, I am no fortune-hunter" (and perhaps at the moment Captain Staunton, like many other worthy mortals, believes what he is saying), "but I would not wrong you by asking you to share the miserable pittance on which I can barely keep myself. Do you think I would submit to see you dragged down from the state of luxury in which you have been reared to the discomforts of such a home as I could offer you? Would it be love to do so, Everil? Is there

not something higher and more unselfish in our natures than the indulgence of a passion we can never hope to reward; the acceptance of a sacrifice we can never repay?"

"But I should be happy anywhere with you," she whispers.

"My darling! bless you for those sweet words; only I should be less than a man to take advantage of them. No, Everil, hard as it is to say it, your duty is plainly to follow your father's wishes."

"And you would have me marry Valence!—marry another!" she exclaims, with a sharp cry of pain, as she disengages herself from his clasp, and leans her head against the trunk of a tree. Captain Staunton turns round and buries his face in the grass.

"O! don't torture me by speaking of it. Yet, yes, that is what I mean—you must not be sacrificed for so unworthy a creature as myself."

"You would have me marry another!" she repeats, with almost mechanical astonishment. He starts up, and addresses her rapidly.

"Everil, the plain truth is this; we had better be brave, and face it at once. I cannot—I will not bring you down to poverty. Why not retain your fortune, and—the hope that we may yet—may yet (you understand me, don't you?) come together? Marry your cousin—it will not be for long. I am assured on the best authority—he has assured you himself—that he cannot live. A few months of endurance, perhaps a few months of patience, and you will be again your own mistress. And meanwhile I—"

"You will marry some one else," she says, stonily.

"Never!—I call Heaven to witness, never. No other woman shall replace you. But I shall see you raised to the position you were intended to adorn—honored and respected, surrounded by every luxury—perhaps even contented."

"And you?"

"I shall wait, Everil," he answers, meaningly.

A dark flush, he can hardly trace from what feeling, passes over her face.

"Forgive me, dearest. I should not have said that, perhaps; but you know what I feel. I cannot marry you; but whilst you live and I live, I shall never let go the hope of doing so. Why should we

disguises the truth from one another? You must marry the earl—"

"I will not marry him!" she says, determinately.

"Yes, yes, you will," he answers, soothingly. "You will come to think better of this—you will recognize, as I do, that it is the only chance for our ultimate happiness. I am your friend, Everil—your true friend and lover. Let me counsel you"—laying his hand upon her arm; but she shakes it off as though it had stung her.

"Do not touch me! You have said all you have to say, and I have listened, patiently. Now you must let me go. I don't want your advice, nor your comfort. I only want to—to get away somewhere, and forget, if I can, that all this has ever been."

And so saying, she turns from him, and, with a face pale as ashes, walks rapidly back to the house.

CHAPTER XII.

"FOR MY SAKE."

CAPTAIN MAURICE STAUNTON, left to himself on the grassy knoll, hardly knows what to make of the interview that has passed. He loves the girl, after a fashion, but he loves himself the better of the two; and the intelligence he has just received is a great shock to him.

Everil West-Norman, encircled by a magic halo of rank and riches, is a divinity before whose shrine he would sacrifice everything, even to his own soul; but Everil West-Norman, clad in no panoply but that of her own love and beauty, and looking to him for protection and support, is quite another thing. He may love her under any aspect—so he tells himself; but he cannot afford to worship her unless he is paid for it. Born of a good family, and a wealthy family, so far as its elder branches are concerned, Maurice Staunton has been reared in as luxurious and far more selfish a school than our heroine; and the result of this training has been to make him thoroughly discontented with his present lot, and disposed to consider himself aggrieved much above the majority of his fellow-creatures because he was not born with a golden spoon in his mouth. He is a younger son, dependent on his own resources, and every one who is better off than himself appears to him in the light of an ene-

my. He knows that he has a handsome face and figure, and to enable him to barter these valuable commodities by exchange for an heiress has been the constant aim of his sister, Lady Russell, with whom he is prime favorite. It was to this end she invited him to Greenock Park, and, with the aid of her dear friend Agatha, threw him in Miss West-Norman's way; and to find that he has not only wasted his time and energy, but had his own wings slightly scorched in the enterprise, is a mortifying discovery to the young officer. The first means by which, on being left alone, he tries to console himself is by swearing heartily at Agatha West.

"If that confounded little meddler had not interfered in the business, I should have heard the true state of the case long ago. But trust a woman for making a hash of it if she can. And what has Maria been about to mislead me as she has done? A curse on both of them! Here have I made that poor dear girl and myself miserable for nothing. The whole of her fortune! I am sure Mrs. West told me that a portion only went to Valence. But Everil is not likely to be mistaken. Thirty thousand pounds!—lucky dog!—and coupled with such a woman, too. I wish I were he!"

Then he rises, and still ruminating, with his eyes upon the ground, begins to walk towards the house.

"But a great chance lies before me yet. I shall do as I told Everil. *I shall wait.* Married to Lord Valence under certain conditions ('certain conditions,' of course, means lack of issue), her fortune remains in her own hands. Patience—and I shall hold the cards. There will be no issue—not likely to; but in a few months a widowed wealthy countess—from whose heart I will take good care my image has not faded. Dear sweet Everil!—she loves me—I can read it in every tone of her voice—and she is not a woman to forget. The first throw has proved against me; but it is the staying horse that wins. At any risks, she must marry her cousin."

"Why, Captain Staunton, what are you dreaming of?"

Absorbed in his reflections, he has run nearly into the arms of the little widow. His countenance becomes still more overcast. He is not at all in the mood to receive her advances with equanimity.

"I beg your pardon," he says, coldly.

"What a tone! Has anything occurred to vex you? Where is Everil? I called to her about an hour ago to take a drive with me to Hereford; but, as there was no response, I concluded she was lying *perdue* somewhere in better company than mine. Have you not seen her?"

"Miss West-Norman quitted me about a quarter of an hour ago."

"Where has she gone?"

"I do not know."

"Why did she leave you?"

"I really cannot inform you."

"You haven't quarrelled, I hope?"

"Certainly not! What should we have to quarrel about?"

"But there's something strange about you, Staunton, that I can't make out," says Mrs. West, as she raises her parasol, in order that she may scrutinize his features. "Have you and Everil come to an understanding yet?"

"Did we ever misunderstand each other?"

"O, you know perfectly well what I mean. Have you spoken to her? Is it all right?"

"Have I proposed, you would say? I have not."

"But why this delay?"—anxiously.

"Do you mean, after all, to let her slip through your fingers?"

"I cannot tell you."

"How provoking you are! You talk in this way on purpose to tease me. There only remains one day between this and the twenty-seventh, and you promised me you would speak before then."

"I have not yet broken my promise."

"But do not put it off too long. Everil is a strange unaccountable kind of creature, and were she once drawn into any sort of a decision respecting dear Valence, nothing on earth would make her retract her word. She has such absurd old-fangled notions about honor, and all that sort of rubbish."

"Why are you so anxious she should marry me, Mrs. West?"

"Only for your sake and her own, Staunton," says the widow, blushing and twisting about her parasol. "She loves you so much, you would make the dear girl so happy. And then look at poor Valence! Can I see her sacrificed, and him, too (I have no hesitation in saying 'and him, too') for a mere chimera—a

false sense of right? You will speak to her, dear Staunton, will you not?"—sweetly—"You will not keep her longer in suspense?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know! You don't seem to know anything this afternoon. You are very incomprehensible to me. And I cannot say I think you are treating our dear Everil well."

"Miss West-Norman appears perfectly satisfied with my treatment of her. Remember, Mrs. West, that you are arguing without premises. But I must wish you good afternoon. It is nearly five o'clock."

"And are you not going to stay to dinner?"

"Not this evening, thank you. Maria has company, and I promised her to return."

"But, Captain Staunton,"—turning to detain him—"you will be here to-morrow, will you not?"

"Most likely."

"And on the twenty-seventh? Everil would be terribly disappointed to miss you on her birthday, and especially with the trying ordeal she has to undergo. Poor darling! she will need your help to assist her through it. Fancy her having to make her little confession all alone! But with you by her side, it will be nothing. I believe her guardians meet at eleven. Of course you will be here by that time?"

"I shall be ready to support Miss West-Norman whenever she may require me, Mrs. West; you may rest assured of that," the young man replies, gravely, as he lifts his hat, and leaves her. She looks after him for some minutes in silence, biting her lip meanwhile.

"There's been a row of some kind between those two people," she thinks as she does so. "I hope to goodness not a serious one. What can it be? I must find out, and patch it up. It would never do for them to quarrel just now. Everil is capable of anything when in a rage. Pshaw! it can be but a lovers' quarrel, and they'll be all the fonder for it afterwards. He looks as miserable as he can be, and I dare say she's crying her eyes out up stairs. Perhaps, after all, it's the best thing that could have happened. They'll become so 'spoony' over their reconciliation that she will have the heart to refuse him nothing. As soon as I see Everil I shall find it all

out, and then I can write to Maurice by the evening's post."

But Mrs. West does not find it all out as easily as she anticipates. Everil West-Norman appears at the dinner-table, a shade paler perhaps than usual, but in, apparently, higher spirits than she has evinced since the arrival of her cousin.

She talks and laughs with Lord Valence without a trace of the reserve or coldness that has hitherto characterized her intercourse with him, although her wit too often bears in it a dash of bitter sarcasm; whilst he, relieved by the change in her manner, and not guessing at the cause that has occasioned it, appears in a better light than he has ever done before.

Mrs. West is fairly puzzled; but though she makes more than one attempt to solve the mystery, her cousin appears ready armed to drive her back from every point.

"My dear, what is the meaning of all this?" she asks, as soon as they are alone. "Have you and Staunton quarrelled?"

"Quarrelled?"—with a well-feigned look of surprise; "I and Captain Staunton quarrelled! What on earth should we have to quarrel about?"

They are the same words he used to her.

"O, I don't know, darling, but lovers are apt to be a little fanciful. Why didn't he dine here to-night?"

"Lady Russell has company at Greenock, I believe."

"Then you expect him to-morrow, I suppose?"

"I expect nothing. You know he has been used to come and go as he chooses. I conclude he will suit his own convenience. Why are you so anxious on the subject?"

"O, I am not anxious at all! Why should I be? Only I met him as he was going away, and I thought he looked rather glum."

Miss West-Norman laughs.

"That was because he was going away, of course. You wouldn't have had him seem pleased, would you? Alice, dear, do look out some duets; I feel as if I should like to rattle away at the piano all the evening."

"I wish you would persuade Lord Valence to play," says Miss Mildmay. "He sat down at the rectory piano the other day, when he thought we were all out, and my father, who overheard him from his

study, says he plays divinely. I have been longing to hear him ever since."

"I didn't know he could play," replies Everil. "Does he, Agatha?"

"O, beautifully, my dear, when he chooses. But poor dear Valence is rather crotchety, you know, and it is not often I can persuade him to show off before strangers. I am almost afraid he would refuse your request."

"I don't intend to give him the opportunity; I would much rather not hear him play. I hate to see a man perched upon a music-stool, and twiddling away like a music master. And when he adds affectation to it, it becomes abominable."

"My dear Everil, I didn't say he was affected. How you do misjudge poor Valence! You can make no allowance for his great delicacy."

"I didn't know he had any," she retorts, quickly, as she crushes up a certain paper that lies hidden in her bosom.

"O Miss Mildmay, do take her off to the piano, and let us have an end of this!" cries the widow, with affected indignation. "She is altogether too naughty. I shall have to send for some one to come back and help me keep you in order, Everil. You are too much for me alone."

"You are too much for me at any time when you talk such nonsense," replies the heiress, impatiently, as she takes her seat at the instrument.

She plays, or talks, or laughs incessantly during the remainder of the evening; even going the length, at last, when Alice Mildmay strikes up a waltz, of seizing Agatha round the waist, and dancing with her till they are both out of breath.

Mr. Mildmay regards her new mood with astonishment; Miss Strong with pleasure; Mrs. West with secret perplexity and dismay, whilst the earl is wrapt in contemplation of this fresh exhibition of his wayward cousin's capabilities.

"I have never seen the dear girl in better spirits," says Mr. Mildmay, with evident satisfaction. "Everil is like her old self to-night. How charming it is to see the young enjoy themselves, Miss Strong."

"It is indeed, Mr. Mildmay. It is almost sufficient to make one wish one's self once more at the beginning of the journey. This looks well for the twenty-seventh, doesn't it?"

"Humph! Does it strike you in that

light? Well! perhaps so—perhaps. But—” rubbing his chin, thoughtfully—“but young women are a puzzle to me; an incomprehensible puzzle that I shall never make out.”

“Hot-tempered, domineering, ‘slangy’ in talk, and boisterous in manners,” thinks Lord Valence from the sofa, whence he is furtively regarding her. “’Tis a pleasant prospect that lies before me. But there is one comfort—it will not be for long.” And with a sigh he returns to the study of the book which he is perusing.

At last the ordeal is over—blessed bedtime has arrived, and our heroine, with flushed cheeks and feverishly bright eyes, can bid all her guests good-night, and stand face to face with her life’s future.

It is a terrible penance she has passed through; but she has played her cards well and bravely, like many a woman before her, and for the first few moments that she is alone she feels almost victorious. For if there is a mental fight that sears the freshness of the human heart and brings wrinkles and gray hairs before their time, it is that which so often takes place between a woman’s pride and love. The grief that we may lawfully indulge in may be, for the time being, very bitter, but it does not permanently harm us; for nature’s remedies are never hurtful. On the contrary, it rather keeps us young and sympathetic; for none can act the part of comforter like those who remember what they have suffered for themselves. But the misery that dares not disclose its source is quite another thing. The heart is well nigh bursting to confess it, even to its own shame; but the brain, backed up by pride and a terrible fear of what the “world will say,” keeps down the heart, and the conflict between these two great powers hardens instead of softening, and brings every sort of evil in its train. Passive natures sink beneath such a burden; but it makes strong natures reckless. And if ever a woman was in a condition to do or say reckless things, it is Everil West-Norman, on the night of which we are speaking. She is so excited that she almost dances into her bedroom; and so long as Parsons is beside her, she hums snatches of songs, and rattles about all the silver and ivory paraphernalia of her dressing-table, as though she were too happy to be quiet. But even the tedious process of being un-

dressed by a lady’s maid must come to an end at last; and then Everil West-Norman is alone. ALONE!

She tries to keep up the little farce with herself even then. The humming becomes rather more feeble, it is true, and her lips quiver as they try to form the notes; but she goes on manfully for a few seconds, till she suddenly remembers that the air she is singing is a favorite with Maurice Staunton, and at that remembrance breaks down. Breaks down as utterly and completely as the weakest simpleton that walks this earth with a heart within her breast could do, and all the more utterly and completely for the restraint she has hitherto placed upon herself.

She does not blame her lover—there is no true woman but what can find, in the first blush of disappointment, an excuse for the man who has deceived her—but she blames her father, and her fortune, and herself, and everybody and thing but Captain Maurice Staunton, for the misery that has befallen them.

She wonders why Providence ever brought them together, or why she had not the sense to see how events would turn out, and avert them long ago, or the courage to go boldly up to her lover and tell him the truth. She pours out the vials of her mental wrath on the head of Mrs. West for encouraging Staunton to come to Norman House; on her guardians, for opposing him; on Miss Strong, for not having warned her of the coming danger; on the earl, for not having died long ago, and left her to her own devices; on every one but the real delinquent. She cannot recognize the intense selfishness of which Staunton has been guilty in engaging her affections without any certainty as to the issue of his courtship; she will not see (not in these first hours of misery) that he has wooed her for her money, and not for herself. She can only deplore their mutual ill-fortune, and the wicked blindness and hard-heartedness of those who have brought it upon their suffering heads. She can only weep herself blind over the remembered fascinations of her admirer, and the prospect of passing her life without him. She can only, in fact, be miserable!

In the midst of her lamentations (she has cast herself across the bed, the better to enjoy the luxury of weeping), a knock is heard upon her bedroom door.

She leaps to a standing position; and hastily dries her eyes.

"Who is there?"

It is Parsons who answers.

"A note, please, miss, from Greenock Park; and as the man said it was very particular, I thought I had better bring it up to you."

"Any answer?"

"No, miss; no answer—only you was to have it at once."

"Very well; give it to me." And she opens the door only wide enough to receive the envelop. She carries it to the dressing-table, and breaks the seal. It is from Maurice Staunton:

"MY DEAREST EVERIL,—My heart has been trembling with fear ever since you left me this afternoon, lest you should have misinterpreted the reason of my advice. You think, perhaps that I am cold, indifferent; that I do not feel in its utmost bitterness the pang of surrendering you to another. O, how little you know me! Could you but read my heart, you would see I would rather brave death than part with you. But death would be nothing compared with the pain of dragging you down to a life of poverty; and perhaps of struggle. Everil, I have been weak, I have been foolish: led on by my love for you, I have said and done things which I had the right neither to do nor to utter.

"A thousand times I have warned myself of danger; but I little thought I was courting danger for you as well. Pity me, and try to forgive me. You were born to fill a higher and more important station than I can offer you; and I ought to be proud to see you attain it. I am bold enough to write this; then, to entreat you to reconsider the decision you expressed to me of not marrying according to your father's wishes. I know that you are brave and strong, and for the moment it may appear unheroic to give up everything sooner than act against the dictates of your heart; but think if you will be benefited by it. The fact will warp your fortune; and shall we (O Everil, may I be daring enough to use that word too!) be brought any nearer through your poverty? Rather, will not your refusal to agree to this marriage cut off the last ground from beneath my feet?

Everil, if you will not secure your prosperity for your own sake, do it for mine; for me, who love you dearer than myself,

or how could I see you given to another? Under existing circumstances, nothing would induce me to marry you. The world has called me thoughtless—it shall never say that I am wicked. And I love you far too devotedly to do you so cruel a wrong. The present, then, must be for me dark and gloomy. I am a man, and I will bear it as a man; but my future I leave in your hands. If you have ever loved me, do not crush the last hope I cherish of possessing you. Your devoted

"MAURICE."

* * * * *

She reads this grandiloquent epistle several times, and then she falls to weeping over it, poor soul! and kissing it, and persuades herself that the writer is one of the most magnanimous creatures she has ever known. She is a clever woman, but her eyesight is not very clear just now, and she cannot perceive that Captain Staunton's professions of attachment will not hold water.

On the contrary, she votes him higher-minded, more generous, and more unselfish than she can ever hope to become; and thinks of him sacrificing all his deepest feelings on her account, as of some tender true-souled martyr who prefers the fiery stake or the gibbet to a compromise with his great sense of honor.

She passes a miserable night; but it is despair, and not wounded pride, that she her heart, and she suffers for Maurice Staunton as much as for herself. When she descends to breakfast the next morning, the excited, variable mood has settled down again, and she is simply silent and despondent; which revives all Mrs. Went's fears as to her having had a misunderstanding with Staunton. There is a great bustle going on, both inside and outside of Norman House, that day, making preparations for the coming of age on the morrow, and the little widow fidgets about incessantly, in her restless anxiety to know how it is all to end; but Everil is as uncommunicative as the grave. General Hawke arrives in the course of the afternoon, and his first effort is to gain an interview with Mr. Mildmay.

"Well, Mildmay, has the girl told her intentions yet?"

"She has not said a word to me on the subject."

"Nor to the earl?"

"Nor to the earl."

"She means to take him, then."

"I don't think so; she has obstinately refused to listen to any of my suggestions regarding Captain Staunton, and the young man has been here incessantly since your departure. I am almost sure, too, that Everil cares for him. Were it not so, I should still hope she might decide in favor of her cousin; as it is, I am certain she will not."

"Pooh! nonsense! What reason is there against it?"

"She will never act against the dictates of her affections."

"Pshaw! what has affection to do with it? She is not such a fool as to part with her fortune for the sake of a passing fancy. I told you she would marry the earl a month ago, and you contradicted me. I repeat it: she will marry the earl."

"I hardly know what to say or to wish," replies Mr. Mildmay. "To see her impoverished for the sake of a fellow like Staunton would be a terrible misfortune; but, to feel that she had sold her affections, far worse—I wish to-morrow were over, and we knew for a certainty what she intends to do."

"She will marry the earl," repeats the old general, like an obstinate old parrot that pertinaciously sticks to one sentence. "But come, Mildmay, let us join his lordship in the grounds. It seems to me that we are going to a great deal of useless expense about tents. The weather is fine enough. Why the deuce can't the people sit under the trees, and turn their dinner into a picnic? It would be much pleasanter."

"But not so complimentary, general. You forget that the majority will be Everil's tenants, and to consult their feelings becomes a necessity. The arrangements have been made upon a scale truly magnificent; but it was our ward's express orders that it should be so. She has superintended most of them herself. The dancing-booth is like a West-End ballroom."

"Absurd nonsense!" grumbles General Hawke, as they leave the room together. "And what does his lordship say to it?"

"O, Lord Valence has not expressed an opinion on the subject; nor, indeed, has he any right to do so. At what time to-morrow do you propose to receive our ward's decision?"

"At what hour do the guests arrive?"

"The tenant farmers and villagers at eleven, the garden party at three. Dinner is to be served for the former in the large tent at two, and a *dejeuner a la fourchette* for the latter in the dining-hall at five o'clock. I dare say the gentle-people will have all taken their departure by seven. The tenantry will remain to dance and enjoy themselves as long as they please, but they need not interfere with us. The bonfires are to be lit at ten. This is the programme of the day, as far as I can remember."

"Twelve hours of folly, feasting and waste of money," grumbles the general. "Well, tell Miss Everil from me, Mildmay, that we shall be waiting in the drawing-room at ten in the evening to receive her decision. This will give her more time for reflection, and she won't find it so easy, after indulging in a whole day's dissipation, to renounce the means by which such an effect has been produced. I know women better than you do, Mildmay."

"Perhaps so, general. I will not argue the point any farther with you; but I have no doubt myself upon the subject."

* * * * *

The twenty-seventh of May passes under the most favorable of auspices. Everything goes right. The tenantry are enthusiastic, and enjoy themselves to the utmost; the company assemble to a man, and do ample justice to the *dejeuner a la fourchette*. Nothing falls off the end to which it was appointed; and, amongst the crowd, robed in a dazzling costume of blue and white, with a chip hat crowned with blue feathers shading her lovely features, moves incessantly the mistress of Norman House. There is not a suspicion amongst the company that her tenure of all this property hangs on her heart's decision. They believe there is no doubt about her inheritance, and, followed by many an envious eye, she goes from tent to tent to hear her health drank, and to say a few kind words in response. But at last her gracious task is over. The tenantry, who appear to have consumed sufficient beef and veal to last them for a month, have given over eating, and lie scattered about the park sward recruiting themselves for the pleasures of the evening to come; and the more aristocratic of her guests, who have also proved by far the most fatiguing to entertain, have

cleared the dining-room tables to the best of their ability (ladies and gentlemen can eat on such occasions as well as their poorer brethren, and, considering how often the occasions arise for them, in a manner that does great credit to their powers of endurance), and ordered their carriages to drive home.

Everil West-Norman, harassed, fatigued, and, now that the immediate excitement is over, very dispirited, drags her feet wearily along the corridor.

"Everil, dear, they are waiting for you in the drawing-room (you know what for). Will you come?" whispers Alice Mildmay, who has been sent to summon her.

"In the drawing-room?"

In a moment she has turned so ghastly white that her friend thinks she is going to faint.

"O Everil, don't look like that! Are you ill? Shall I call Miss Strong?" cries Alice, as she throws her arm about her.

"Ill! What nonsense! In the drawing-room, did you say? Well, I am ready.

Of course I am ready. I have had long enough to think about it, haven't I? Come, Alice, let us go to them in the drawing-room."

But, as she attempts to move forward, she staggers against the wall.

"Everil, you are ill. I am sure of it."

"The heat—so tired—a glass of water," she murmurs, faintly, as she closes her eyes, and lets her head fall backward.

Miss Mildmay runs to fetch what she requires.

"Thank you, dear," she says, quietly, as she returns the glass to her. "I am all right now, and the feeling has passed away again. I cannot think how I can have been so foolish as to give way to it. Let us go to the drawing-room at once. Do you hear?—at once!"

And, as though fearful of again disclosing her feelings by delay, Everil West-Norman marches straight to the apartment in question, and turns the handle of the door.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I DECIDE TO MARRY MY COUSIN."

BEFORE proceeding with my story, I should like to ask those readers who have accompanied me thus far to suspend their judgment of it, until they learn the reason for which various conditions of life, hitherto untouched, are woven into the narrative. Much that may at first sight appear incomprehensible, superfluous or overdrawn, is necessary to the plot of the story, and much that is likely to provoke criticism will be found to have been introduced with a totally different intention to that arrived at by guessing. And having said so much, I will proceed with my relation.

* * * * *

The occupants of the drawing-room are awaiting the heiress's final decision with very different feelings. Mrs. West has no doubt in her own mind what it will be. She has been very much put out by the non-appearance of any of the Greenock Park people at the *fete champetre* that day; but Lady Russell has sent her a note, explaining her absence on the score of illness in her nursery; and Agatha can well understand that Captain Staunton would feel it to be better taste in him to keep away on the occasion. He would wish Everil's friends to suppose that, if she was determined to give up everything for his sake, she was entirely unblinded in her decision by his immediate influence. And that Everil does so intend to give up everything rather than himself, Mrs. West is perfectly certain.

True, that her behaviour has appeared rather incomprehensible during the last few days, that her eyes have been red with weeping, and her manner cold and constrained; but Agatha attributes these phenomena to the struggle with which she must necessarily decide between retaining her fortune or Maurice Staunton. But that, after all her opposition on the subject, and determination to have her own way, she can end by resigning her lover, is an idea that has never seriously entered

the widow's head. Everil may feel it—it is impossible that she cannot feel it; but the enormity of the sacrifice will only add to its value in her eyes, and she will be true to Maurice and to herself. So Mrs. West, clad in the palest of peach-blossom costumes, covered with the softest of lace, sits close to her beloved brother-in-law, smiling furtively at her coming triumph, and ready to act the ministering angel to Lord Valence as soon as ever the inevitable blow shall have descended on his head. The earl himself is in reality the most assured on the subject of all there. Agatha West, in order to prevent any interference on his part, has so impressed the fact upon his mind that his cousin has never dreamed of doing otherwise than fulfil her father's wishes by marrying him, that he is simply awaiting his fate with the sublime submission of indifference. Mr. Mildmay, on the contrary, is strongly agitated. He loves his ward only second to his daughter, and the idea that she should marry Lord Valence against her inclination, or give up everything for the sake of Maurice Staunton, is equally distasteful to him. He walks restlessly up and down the room, thinking one moment that Everil had better ten thousand times over marry the earl without love than Captain Staunton with; the next, that no blessing can possibly follow a union entered into for mere calculation, and that the girl will be happier penniless with a pure conscience, than if she began life on false pretences. Miss Strong somewhat shares his feelings; but the feminine love for rank and riches predisposes her to hope that her pupil's decision will be in favor of the earl, and not for that "forward and presuming Captain Staunton." She sighs over the misfortune that has befallen Everil in having conceived a predilection for the young officer, but fancies, woman-like, that if she had the management of affairs put into her hands, everything would turn out right in the end, and the earl and countess live happily forever afterwards. Still, the old lady is very anxious and unhappy, and keeps furtively wiping the corners of her eyes with

a fragment of cambric handkerchief, and hoping that no one observes her unusual agitation. No one does observe it, for everybody is occupied with his own thoughts, and on the tiptoe of expectation. Only Mr. Thorneycroft, the family solicitor, Mr. Craven, the earl's legal adviser, and old General Hawke treat it as a mere matter of business.

"You have both made yourselves well acquainted with the conditions of the late Mr. West-Norman's will, gentlemen," says the latter, loudly; "and the young lady is perfectly familiar with them also, so we need have no recapitulation. We need nothing now but her signature and that of Lord Valence, and our business is completed. Where's the pen? Has any one been sent to call Miss West-Norman? We only want her name placed here. It won't take her a minute, and then the job's over. Does she know we are waiting?"

"I have sent my daughter to fetch her," replies Mr. Mildmay. "But, general, it appears to me you are taking Everil's consent as too much a matter of certainty. Remember, we have to ask for her decision first. I am not quite sure myself of what it will be."

"But I am quite sure, sir, and I've told you so a dozen times already. She'll be Lady Valence within the month. I wish I had a clear thousand standing on the event."

"Ladies' fancies are uncertain things to bet upon, general," observes Mr. Thorneycroft, smiling. "I'd as soon back a shifting sand."

"Not if it carried gold with it," growls General Hawke. "Metal is the best ballast for women's minds—if they have such things."

"I think it would be as well to leave this discussion to another opportunity," says Lord Valence, with a frown. When General Hawke prophesied that his cousin would bear his name within the month, he started; it brought the contingency so vividly before him; and what followed seems like an insult to his future wife.

"General Hawke is always so terribly hard upon us poor women," simpers the little widow, hating him in heart for the assurance with which he has spoken.

"Here is Everil," says Mr. Mildmay, as the door suddenly opens, and the heiress, followed by Alice, stands amongst them.

Lord Valence is about to rise to meet and lead her forward; but Mrs. West pulls him back.

"Don't do that, Valence, for Heaven's sake!" she whispers.

"Why not? Why do you detain me?"

"Because—it is not a settled thing yet, remember. She has still to announce her decision; and if it should not be—though of course it will—but you might place her in an awkward position, poor girl. Don't make any advances till you hear what she has to say."

"I cannot now; you have effectually prevented it; the time is past," he replies, somewhat hastily, as he reseats himself. "But I wish you wouldn't always interfere with everything I wish to do or say, Agatha."

"O Valence! how can you?" she whispers, reproachfully; but he has turned his back on her, and fixed his eyes on Everil West-Norman.

She is standing in front of her guardians and the lawyers, supporting herself by resting one hand on the table. Her face is exceedingly pale, and the yellow lamplight behind which she stands makes it look still paler; but her features are almost stern in their composure.

"I have just been telling these gentlemen," commences General Hawke, after a rapid survey of her countenance, "that as both they and you are perfectly well acquainted with the contents and provisions of your late father's will, there is no need of recapitulation."

"But merely as a matter of form, my dear sir," interposes Mr. Craven. "Mr. Thorneycroft and myself, who are summoned as witnesses—although of course we have every faith in your assertion of this young lady's knowledge of the conditions under which—"

The general is beginning to storm, and Mr. Mildmay to remonstrate; but the girl's voice silences them both.

"Read it through," she says, quietly, as she points with her finger to the document in question.

The lawyer begins.

"Wont you sit down, my dear?" whispers Mr. Mildmay, as he pushes a chair towards her; but she waves him off, and remains standing. The tedious will is read through by the lawyer, who appears to spin out the words as slowly as he possibly

can. The conditions, involved and wrapped up in sentences of extraordinary length and insoluble meaning, are repeated again and again, until the brain aches with the endeavor to unravel and make them clear. But the final intention is plain enough: that Everil West-Norman must marry Bernard, Earl of Valence, or lose her fortune. And as the long list of the property to be forfeited is drawled through, Mrs. West grows hot and uneasy, and fidgets on her chair, and trusts that the heiress's thoughts are wandering away to Maurice Staunton, or anywhere, rather than fixed on the awful loss she will sustain in keeping faith with him.

Everil hears it to the end, unmoved. Then, as the lawyer finishes and lays the parchment on the table, she essays to speak, but no sound issues from her lips.

"Now this, as it appears to me, most unnecessary formula, has been gone through with—" commences General Hawke, with a scowl at Thorneycroft.

"But as a matter of business, my dear sir, a matter of business," says the lawyer, deprecatingly.

"We only wait for your final decision and signature to end the matter."

Agatha West has crept round from the other side of the room, and put her arm about Everil's waist, as though to support her.

"Courage, dearest; courage!" she whispers, softly.

"I have no need of support, thank you," replies the heiress, as she disengages herself from the widow's clasp.

"Ah! you think of him; and that is enough for you," continues Mrs. West. "Be brave, darling, and remember that I am close by and feeling for you."

"Come, young lady. I suppose you have thought this matter well over. You need not keep us waiting longer than necessary," says General Hawke. "What is your decision?"

"I will marry my cousin!"

Mrs. West's face undergoes all manner of changes.

"Everil! Everil! what are you saying? Don't let them frighten you into consenting against your will."

"It is not against my will!"

"But you can never mean it! Think of poor Maurice!"

"Be quiet. I do think of him."

"My dear girl," says Mr. Mildmay, in a low tone, taking her hand in his own; "tell me that you are not acting from undue pressure—that this decision comes from your heart."

"Where else should it come from?" she replies, hurriedly, as she wrenches her hand out of his. "Am I not a free agent? General Hawke will agree with me that it is only right I should submit to be guided by those who know better than myself, and carry out my father's wishes in this matter?"

"Assuredly it is, my dear; and I always said you would do so." ("So much for your doubts," adds the general, snapping his fingers at Mr. Mildmay.) "And now, before you sign these papers, let us hear you once more tell us what you have decided to do."

"I decide to marry my cousin Lord Valence," she repeats, steadily, though she does not cast a glance at him the while. He has been standing since the first announcement of her intention, and now he comes forward and tries to take her hand; but Everil puts it quickly behind her and regards him with a look that is almost defiant. And any one near enough to her at that moment might hear her say between her teeth, "For your sake—for your sake," before the look of defiance fades away to give place to her former expression of set resolution.

"I have to congratulate you, my lord," says the general, grimly. And then the papers for signature are placed before the cousins, and the pen is passed from Lord Valence's hand to hers. As Everil takes it she puts out her left hand blindly, as though seeking for the support of some one, and Miss Strong (who, inwardly elated at the turn matters have taken, has drawn near in order to be the first to whisper good wishes in her pupil's ear) catches it between her own and holds it firmly. The tenacious grasp with which it clings to hers nearly upsets the old lady's equilibrium, though the signature of the right hand is very tremulous and unlike Everil's usual writing. Her task concluded, she turns abruptly from the table and stumbles into the arms of her duenna.

"O my dear! my dear! I do hope that you will be happy," ejaculates the old woman, half crying over her; "for though I have never been through it myself, I know

many that have, and can imagine what it is. And it's all a lottery, my love; but I am sure you've drawn a prize, and I hope God will bless your union with him and send you every blessing this life can afford."

"Hush! hush! Pray don't say that. I have done what they wished, and there's an end of it," replies Everil, as she disengages herself from Miss Strong's embrace.

"Come, madam, there's nothing to cry for in your charge being made a countess," says the general, with his usual coarseness. "There's many a woman would be glad to stand in her shoes, even if they don't fit to a nicety."

Again is Lord Valence's sense of delicacy shocked. He does not love his cousin, but it is sacrilege to hear their contemplated union spoken of like this.

"Since the business for which we met is concluded," he remarks, loftily, "I think, Hawke, we had better adjourn and leave the ladies to themselves. Will you conduct these gentlemen to the library?—and Mildmay and I will join you there. Good-evening."

He raises his cousin's passive hand to his lips as he speaks, and, accompanied by the other men, quits the apartment.

The four women are left standing there by themselves. Dead silence at first reigns among them; then it is broken by Alice Mildmay bidding Everil good-night in a timid uncertain manner, as if she did not know if she might add congratulations to it or not, and taking her departure for the rectory.

The silence settles down again. Everil stands by the table twisting a paper-knife about in her hands; Mrs. West sits on the farthest sofa gloomy and absorbed. They intend to speak to each other—by-and-by.

Miss Strong gives an uneasy cough, and rises. She is evidently *de trop*. "It is very late," she remarks in passing, "and Everil must be in want of rest." Everil thanks her blandly, but denies the charge, and in another moment Miss Strong's place knows her no more.

Then they are together, and alone. The storm bursts.

"I never could have believed it!" exclaims Agatha West between her teeth, as she leaves her seat and confronts the heiress at the table. "No, not if the Archangel Gabriel himself had descended to

tell it me. I cannot believe it now. It appears almost incredible."

"Of what are you speaking?" demands her companion, professing surprise.

"You know! Of your deciding to marry Valence. And after all the encouragement you have given Maurice Staunton; the way in which you have led that poor young fellow on—making him believe that you intended to give up everything for his sake—just to throw him over at the first opportunity! I thought you were more womanly—more generous—more true."

"Stay, Agatha," interposes the heiress, still, to all appearance, unmoved. "Who told you I had promised all this to Captain Staunton?"

The widow pauses. When she comes to think of it, it would be awkward to have to disclose how she came by her information.

"Why, of course you did," she answers, with feminine logic. "Everybody in the house could see it. You have been together morning, noon and evening for the last month, spite of all my entreaties to the contrary, and now you ask who told me you were fond of one another! Why, the poor boy dotes on you, and you would break his heart and ruin all his hopes for the sake of mere wealth! I thought better of you, Everil. I thought that, with your strong mind and independent spirit, you would be brave enough to defy the world for the sake of the man you loved."

"And how do you know I am not defying it?" demands Miss West-Norman, quickly.

"For a coronet with thirty thousand a year," retorts the widow. "That is *your* notion of defying the world, perhaps; but a real affection would have preferred to pass through life penniless sooner than resign the creature that it clung to."

"And why did you not speak as plainly to me before? You have encouraged Maurice Staunton to come here by every means in your power; but you have been careful at the same time to place before me all the disadvantages of marrying him, and the assurance that in the end I could only act as I am acting now, and fulfil the last wishes of my father by becoming the wife of my cousin."

"Why did I not do so? Because I thought it was my duty to place Valence's cause before you in the best possible light; but I never thought for a moment you

could be so untrue to your own heart as this evening has proved you. To make love to a man in the most open and indecent manner, knowing you were on the verge of accepting another—to draw him on to make love to you under false pretences—”

“Stop, Agatha,” says Miss West-Norman, haughtily. “I will permit you to proceed with this subject no longer; you have already said more than enough. I do not consider that I owe you any explanation in the matter; but for—for—Captain Staunton’s sake, and to prove that I think too highly of him to jilt him in the heartless manner of which you accuse me, I will tell you one thing—that he not only knew of my intention to accept my cousin’s proposals, but approved of it.”

“*Staunton approved of it!* But it is impossible,” cries the widow. “How did it come about? When did you speak to him of it? What made you change your mind so suddenly?”

“I shall tell you no more than I have done already,” replies Miss West-Norman, with a trembling lip. “It is sufficient for you to know that your accusations against me are unfounded, and that I have not wronged your friend, nor he—he—me—”

“Everil, you love Maurice Staunton still?”

“Who denies it?” she says, as her calmness gives way before the bitter recollection of her unfortunate attachment.

Mrs. West is by her side in a moment.

“My dear girl, it is some wretched quarrel that has made you act against your own feelings in this manner. It will all come right, Everil; I will answer that it shall all come right. I will see Maurice to-morrow, and tell him how you are suffering, and we shall have him at your feet again before the day is over.”

“You will do no such thing, Agatha,” says the heiress, quickly, as she dries her eyes. “Captain Staunton and I have had no quarrel; we have simply determined on what was best to be done for both of us, and I have done it, and there can be no alteration.”

“Nonsense, darling! You’re thinking of the signature, I suppose; but Valence would let you off that directly, if I asked him.”

“*Valence would let me off!*” says the girl, with a look of scorn. “And do you think

I am so feeble-minded a creature, Agatha, as to sign with my hand one moment what I would go down on my knees the next to be excused from? Do you suppose I met my guardians this evening without previously weighing the consequences of what I was about to do? How absurd of you! I have passed my word, and nothing on earth would make me now retract. I have promised to become Countess of Valence, and Countess of Valence I shall be. Any other ideas that I may have entertained are as entirely swept off my mind now as if they had never been there. I shall marry my cousin.”

Angry words in answer are bubbling to the very verge of Mrs. West’s lips; but one thought restrains them. The future Lady Valence stands before her, and the future Lady Valence is a person to be conciliated, not defied; so she swallows her indignation, and sighs instead of scolding.

“Well, dear, you are of course the best judge of what is calculated to form your own happiness; and if poor dear Valence could only see it, he is a very fortunate man. And as for poor Maurice, broken hearts don’t kill, do they? and he must try and get over his disappointment, as other men have done before him, though I don’t think he is a man who would easily forget. I wonder what dear Lady Russell will say; she does so dote upon her brother.”

“Don’t waste any more time in speculation to-night, Agatha. It is past twelve, and we are both tired. But remember one thing: my resolution has been formed and taken, and nothing will make me change it now. Further I must forbid you even to mention such a possibility to me again. Good-night.”

And without proffering her usual embrace, Miss West-Norman leaves the room. It is not too much to say that the look the widow throws after her is one of positive hatred.

“So she said with respect to her determination not to marry Valence,” she thinks, as she lingers a moment when they have parted; “and yet she veered round like a weathercock. Can she have had it in her mind to fulfil her engagement all along? Hardly; she is too bold to act a falsehood. But how can this have come about? All the plans I have thought out, and the trouble I have taken, wasted! I must see Maurice at once. I will go over to Greenock

the first thing to-morrow, and speak to him on the subject. She cannot have acted with his free consent. They have had some lovers' quarrel, and he has told her in his anger to do as she pleases; and she has braved it out. If that is the case, his presence will soon melt her resolution into thin air again, and I will persuade Valence to offer to release her from her promise. It's a dangerous game to play; but for Arthur's sake what would I not stake, even to my own salvation. He shall not be cut out of his dead father's inheritance until no power on earth can prevent it; and the powers of earth have a great deal in their hands, if they only know how to exercise it. We may triumph yet."

CHAPTER XIV.

"COME, MRS. WEST, LET IT BE A BARGAIN."

THE fatigue and excitement of the preceding day have caused the inhabitants of Norman House to feel lazy; and whether they sleep well, or otherwise, it is late before they are stirring on the following morning. Mrs. West is the first to rise. Surprise and speculation have combined to render her wakeful, and her eyes are open almost as soon as the sun shines in at her window. She cannot rest until she has seen Maurice Staunton, and received some explanation from him of the extraordinary change in Everil's opinions, and, apparently, his own. So she dresses quickly, with a view to slipping out of the house before the object of her morning drive can excite attention. Her little Arthur, flushed from his long quiet slumber, lies in the bed she has just quitted.

As the mother turns to leave the room she stands and gazes at him for a moment fondly. His dark tangled hair is cast about the pillow; long lashes shade his crimsoned cheeks; his rosy lips are parted; he looks like a sleeping cherub. The boy is, without doubt, a very handsome child, and as Agatha regards him tears rise to her eyes from proud affection.

"My darling," she whispers, "my own sweet boy! I would die for you."

No one in this world is utterly bad; no one is utterly untrue. Agatha West is about as good a specimen of an unscrupulous, unfeeling, deceitful woman as human

nature has ever produced; and yet, for the sake of her offspring, she affirms, with real tears in her eyes the while, that she could die—and she means it, too. Arthur is her world, her god. The little unconscious child has the power to make his mother true—not to herself, for her natural tendencies are to deceive—but to him. As a wife, as a friend, as a confidante, Mrs. West is unfit to be trusted; she can lie, act, mislead and betray with the easiest of consciences, yet she is a faithful mother. All her affections and interests are centred in her boy. Were he starving, she would steal for him; had he an enemy, she would murder him; were he threatened with danger, she would lay down her life for him. Her devotion to Arthur, to whose father she was completely indifferent, is the one divine spark in her nature that preserves her from becoming (peachy-faced, pretty little woman though she be) lower than the beasts that perish. And this insight to her feelings will explain her ardent desire to keep her brother-in-law from marrying, and leaving an heir to inherit his title.

She linked her fate to that of the Honorable Arthur West, not because she loved him, but because he was the only brother of a weakly and unsociable young earl, of whom long days and a happy married life were prognosticated by no one; and for the remote chance of becoming a countess, the pretty hard-worked governess would have sacrificed her soul. But the ambitious dream faded. Arthur was the first called upon to quit this scene of small hopes and petty struggling; and he left a widow ambitious still, it is true, but no longer for herself. All her wishes then were turned in the direction of preserving the title for Arthur's son. All her aim and object since have been to force the course of events into the same direction. She has obtained an influence over the mind of her dreamy, mystic brother-in-law, more because he values her professed affection than her advice; because she has relieved him also of all trouble with respect to the charge of his establishment; and evinced a lively interest in the pursuits and studies that occupy his mind to the exclusion of all outside things. Lord Valence is not particularly attached to Agatha, but he thinks that he could not do without her; and she takes good care, by means known best to herself, to keep up the delusion. If

she could only prevent the earl's marriage with Everil West-Norman from taking place, all, she believes, would be well. She knew it would be no use attempting to persuade Lord Valence to act contrary to his notions of equity and honor, and therefore she has not tried in any way to bias his actions, but has worked with every expectation of success on the heiress's sense of pride and love of mastery instead. With this end in view she has spent a couple of months at Norman House; with this end in view she has encouraged the attentions of Maurice Staunton, and removed every obstacle that appeared in his pathway. And now to find her house of cards has toppled down; that all her time and trouble have been wasted; and Everil has dared to fight her with her own weapons, and *take her in* by consenting to become Lady Valence, is a *dénouement* of which the little widow never dreamed; that has been disclosed so suddenly and unexpectedly as almost to take away her breath. But she still cherishes a faint hope that the lovers may be brought together again, and Everil's feelings made to get the better of her judgment. But in order to accomplish this, the *intriguante* must have an interview with Captain Staunton; and it is for that purpose that, bonneted and shawled, she creeps down stairs and enters the breakfast-room. The sleepy-faced footman whom she summons to provide her with coffee and rolls, opens his eyes to their widest to see one of the ladies down so early as nine o'clock, after ten hours of incessant exertion; but he does as she requires him, and takes her order to the stables for the pony-carriage to be round at the door as soon as it can be got ready. Mrs. West knows she is not overstepping the bounds of etiquette at Norman House, by issuing such an order without any reference to its mistress, for Everil is a large-hearted and minded hostess, and always wishes her guests to be as much at home as she is herself.

As Agatha steps into the carriage, she desires the footman, should any inquiries be made on the subject, to tell Miss West-Norman she has gone for a country drive; but as soon as the coachman has entered the lanes that surround Norman House, she desires him to take her to Greenock Park. On her way there she weaves a plausible little tale of anxiety for the

health of dear Lady Russell's children to account for her early appearance; but she finds the whole family at the breakfast-table, and so eager to learn all about the festivities of the day before, that, for once in her life, she is saved from telling an untruth. Sir Henry, who has not been let into the secret of Captain Staunton's flirtation with the heiress, condemns loudly the laziness of his brother-in-law in having made the measles an excuse for not going to the party without his sister's company.

"I was twenty miles the other way on business, unfortunately for myself," continues the baronet, "or nothing should have induced me to miss it. I consider Miss West-Norman the handsomest woman in Herefordshire; and Valence is not a bad-looking fellow. They'll make a fine couple! Lucky dog, to get wealth and beauty at once. It is not every one has his good fortune."

"Is there no hope, then, for my poor dear Maurice?" whispers Lady Russell, plaintively, to her friend, whilst Captain Staunton frowns, and pulls his mustache, and glares out of the open window.

"There may be; I cannot consider it settled even now. But why was he not present yesterday?"

"He will not tell me," in the same tone. "I think she must have refused him."

"Impossible! I am sure she hadn't! But there is some misunderstanding between them, which perhaps I can remove. Dear Lady Russell, do contrive that I may have a private interview with him."

Her friend's only answer is a squeeze of the hand, but Mrs. West is satisfied, and talks cheerfully during the remainder of her visit. It is for this reason that, as she rises to go, Lady Russell urges her brother to take the widow down to the flower-garden.

"I have a new bed of roses this year that is perfectly enchanting. I would go with you myself, dear, but I must pay my morning visit to the nursery. No! Henry, I cannot spare you as well as Maurice; besides, the doctor will be here directly, and want to speak to you. Good-by, dear Agatha, and do not let so long a time elapse before you pay us another visit; and mind you take care of Mrs. West, Maurice, and see her safely into her carriage."

And so the two plotters are left to each other's company. Agatha does not speak

until they are well out of sight and hearing, and then she dashes into the subject at once.

"Captain Staunton! what on earth is the meaning of all this? Why were you not at the fete yesterday?"

"Because I knew my presence would not be welcome."

"But why? Have Everil and you quarrelled? You promised me you would speak to her before the twenty-seventh, and now the twenty-seventh has come and gone without a sign from you. And do you know what the consequence is? She has agreed to marry Valence."

"I concluded she would do so."

"But, good heavens! am I dreaming? Can you let such a chance slip through your fingers without an effort to retain it? And when she is so fond of you, too, that a word would have secured her. I think you have treated her shamefully."

"She does not think so. It was by mutual consent she acted as she has done."

"I do not understand you."

"I will try and explain myself. I never heard the conditions of her father's will till two days ago."

Mrs. West colors, and begins to play nervously with her parasol.

"But I told you of them."

"Excuse me, you told me but a part. You said, in the event of her marrying any one but Lord Valence, a portion of her fortune lapsed to his estate, whereas I find that it is all. I might have married her with half a fortune; I cannot afford to do so with none. When this was made plain to me, both Miss West-Norman and I saw the necessity of drawing back from our intimacy. I urged her to agree to a union with her cousin; she yielded to my advice."

"And with what design?" demands Agatha, breathlessly. "What do you hope for in the future?"

He smiles furtively.

"You conclude I must have a hope. Well, to speak plainly, my hope points to the hour which shall see her free again."

"And if that does not arrive?"

"A scarcely probable contingency, is it? But should that not arrive—well, Lady Valence will be in precisely the same position as regards myself as Miss West-Norman is now—unmarriageable."

"Staunton! you are more unscrupulously inclined than I took you to be."

"Indeed! I did not know that you put any limits to my want of scruples, Mrs. West. I put none to yours."

The calmly insolent tone makes her redder, but she does not resent it.

"You know that what I wanted, and still want, is to see you and Everil happily married."

"I know that what you want is to have your own way in all things, and to make me your instrument. But I cannot sacrifice myself so easily as that, Mrs. West. If I am to assist your plans, it must be at my own convenience."

"How do you know I have any plans?"

"I should be a greater fool than you take me for if I did not guess why you are so eager to keep Lord Valence single for a little time longer. You have a son—"

"O Captain Staunton!" she cries, clasping her hands, "is it not natural? Surely the title should be Arthur's by rights, his own brother's child! If my poor husband had lived, he would have come into it; and now to see it pass away, perhaps to another, and for no real good—for Valence's mind is totally averse to marriage—is very hard for me to contemplate. And I thought you would have saved me from the trial."

"And so I would were it not at such a sacrifice. But I cannot marry a woman without a half-penny. I can't afford it, 'pon my soul, I can't, Mrs. West, although I'm awfully fond of her. I'm cut up enough about this business as it is."

"And there is no hope left for either of us," says the little widow, plaintively.

"There's always the hope that the earl may die, and that his widow may revert to me; in which case some of the money is sure to go with the title. Look here, Mrs. West, you and I understand each other pretty well. Promise to do all you can to gain me admittance to Castle Valence, and I'll work with you to the end."

"O, but once they are married, it will be better to leave it all to Providence," says Mrs. West, solemnly.

"Don't talk such nonsense! If I am to have any chance in the future, I must keep the memory of my disappointment alive in her breast. And, hang it all, it has been a disappointment, and no mistake, remember."

"And what then?"

"Once married to Lord Valence, Everil holds the disposal of her property in her

own hands. But I will say no more, excepting that I cannot lose sight of her, and that you must continue to be my friend and ally. Come Mrs. West, let it be a bargain. You will agree with me that it will be for both our interests not to permit any stronger influence to surround her than our own."

"Most certainly. There is my hand on it. But Everil is not easily led."

"It depends upon who leads her. You should have seen her despair when I broke my determination to her."

"And did you tell her your hopes?"

"I hinted at them. I dared do no more. She will bear renewal of the subject better three months hence."

Mrs. West sets her lips together. She is not so certain of the facility of her cousin's morals.

"You must go your own way, Captain Staunton. You have neglected to take my advice, and you have greatly disappointed me."

"You should have told me the truth at first, then, and I should never have raised your hopes. But it is true, is it not, that Lord Valence cannot live long?"

"The doctors say so. They consider his mind diseased. But doctors are not infallible."

"Let us hope for the best. Meanwhile you and I are friends, and have promised to assist each other."

"Shall you not come again to Norman House?"

"I think not. I think it will have a better effect on her if I leave the place altogether. But say you saw me, and that I was quite broken down with regret and disappointment; as indeed I am. When is the marriage to be?"

"It has not been talked of yet; but I suppose everything will be settled as speedily as possible. I feel mad when I think of it. I made sure Everil and you had quarrelled, and came over this morning with the hope of bringing you together again."

"We never quarrelled. We simply told each other the truth. And I think she sees it in the same light that I do—as an unavoidable misfortune—though she did say, poor dear girl! that she'd give up the world for me."

"I believe she would, Captain Staunton."

"Well, perhaps I shall ask her again

some day. Meanwhile don't let her forget me."

They have retraced their steps by this time, and have reached the side of the pony-chaise.

"Good-by," he says, cheerfully, as he hands her into it. "My kind remembrances to all at Norman House; and mind you write and let me know everything that happens."

And as he smiles, and raises his hat, and she is driven off in the direction of her home again, Agatha West feels that one section of the game is really lost, and that if she is yet to succeed in her design, it must be by directing her energies into another channel.

CHAPTER XV.

"WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER PERFECTLY NOW."

MRS. WEST meets Everil as though nothing unpleasant had passed between them the night before.

"My darling," she says, enthusiastically, as she stoops down to kiss the girl's cheek, "how sweet you are looking this morning. I have hardly been able to sleep all night for thinking of you, Everil. I am so thankful things have turned out as they have. It is all for the best, depend on it. These little disappointments, dearest,"—in a whisper—"we are all subject to in the course of our lives. You would scarcely believe how often I have been disappointed myself; and yet we live to look back and smile upon them. I am sure poor dear Valence ought to be eternally grateful to you for the sacrifice you have made for him; and we shall all be so happy together at Castle Valence, shan't we, dear?"—with a reassuring smile.

But Miss West-Norman does not appear very grateful for her advances. On the contrary, she avoids them.

"You have been out early this morning, Agatha."

"Yes, darling, I wanted a little freshening up after our fatigues of yesterday, and I had so much to think about. How grateful we ought to feel," says the widow with a look of sanctity, "when things turn out as we have prayed for. It seems so like an answer, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it must."

"And to think that you and Valence—poor dear Valence, who has been such a cause of anxiety and care to me for so many years past—should be about to become one! I can scarcely believe it. I shall make over all my stock of troubles and worries to you now," ends Mrs. West, playfully.

"I am much obliged to you, Agatha."

"And how is dear Valence this morning? You have seen him, of course?"

"Indeed I have not."

"O you naughty girl! what must he think of you? But perhaps he breakfasted in his room. The excitement of yesterday will have affected him sadly, I am afraid."

"I have seen no one but Miss Strong and my guardians. General Hawke has already returned to town. As you seem so interested in the subject, Agatha, perhaps it will please you to hear that the marriage is already fixed for the first of August."

"Really!" exclaims the widow, as she clasps her hands, and kneels down by Everil's side. "O my dear girl, what happiness! And now all will be well, will it not? and you will promise me never to think again of anything I may have said to you last night? You know my reasons for doing so, don't you, my dear? It was altogether against my own advantage to speak as I did. It was simply in the cause of friendship, and because I felt, perhaps, that I had acted thoughtlessly in the matter of poor Staunton, and encouraged his visits here more than I ought to have done."

"Yes, yes! I understand perfectly. There is no need to recapitulate."

"But, after all, my dear, it was rather presumptuous of poor Maurice, wasn't it? He had no right to look as high as you; and I have no doubt he acknowledges the fact to himself by this time. And, in your position as Countess of Valence, you will have so many opportunities of befriending the poor boy. You will always be a friend to him, won't you, Everil?"

"Always!"

"I am so glad to know that, for poor Lady Russell's sake; for she positively dotes upon her brother. He is sure to join his regiment, my dear. He could not bear the sight of this place after what has happened; and I don't wonder at it. His sister says he is heartbroken; but then she is so very partial to him. It is quite as well he should be out of the way."

"It is much better. Agatha, do you in-

tend to sit in your walking things all the morning?"

"O no, my dear, I am just going to disrobe myself; but this conversation has been so fascinating. Well, well," as she rises, "a thousand more congratulations to you, and I am off."

"Inexplicable creature!" thinks Everil, as Mrs. West leaves the room. "What am I to believe or disbelieve of her?"

She leans her head forward until it touches the cushion of the sofa on which she sits, and presses her forehead hard against it.

"Heartbroken! If he is so, what must I be? It is a common term to use; but, if it means to have lost all interest in life or living, I know what it is like."

"Lord Valence desires to know if he can see you, madam."

She raises her head languidly to answer "Yes," and not a pulse quickens, as she awaits his coming.

In another minute he is with her.

He also appears to feel no excitement at the meeting. He enters the room with a pleasant smile upon his countenance, kisses the hand which she extends to him, and places himself upon the sofa by her side with the most perfect equanimity.

"I hope we did not keep you up too late last night," is his first greeting.

"O, not at all."

"I saw General Hawke before his departure, and he tells me you are good enough to consent to the marriage taking place on the first of August. I owe you many thanks for your affability."

"Don't mention it. My guardians thought it would be a suitable time, and I have no choice in the matter."

"I admire your frankness. We are entering life, as people should do, without any secrets."

But here Lord Valence hesitates and colors, then goes on stammeringly: "I mean, we do not profess to feel more for each other than we do."

Everil answers nothing, and he seems a little disappointed.

"You have never even cared for me as a cousin," he continues.

"I never had the opportunity."

"True; and if you had, our characters and dispositions are so opposite. But you like Agatha, do you not?—and you will have her for a companion."

"Yes, Agatha and I have always been friendly with each other. What do you intend to do during the next month?"

"I return to Castle Valence until the end of July. I have not yet consulted your wishes on the subject, but I hope you will not object to reside there. The place is old and lonely; but it is endeared to me by the memories of my father and brother."

"I shall, of course, follow your wishes in that respect. It will make no difference to me where I live. Only I suppose it will not be all the year round. You will let me return to Norman House for a few weeks in the summer?"

"By the time the summer comes round again you will be your own mistress, Everil," he answers gravely. She changes countenance, and looks distressed.

"I cannot believe it. If you have any fatal disease that must terminate your life so shortly, surely I ought to be told of it now."

"I have no disease of which you could recognize the name. But all the same, I shall not be your husband long. And for the brief time that remains to me, I claim your indulgence to reside at Castle Valence. It is the place I was born in—it is the place in which I should wish to die. Say that you will grant me this favor before you are my wife?"

"But you disturb me greatly," she replies, and her face shows signs of agitation. "It shocks me to think that, with this doom (which I cannot believe to be certain) hanging over your head, you should feel compelled to take the cares of married life upon you, in order to secure to me a fortune which you do not believe you will live to enjoy with me."

"Does it distress you?" he says, almost eagerly. "Is it possible that you can feel so deeply for the fate of a man to whom you confess yourself indifferent? O Everil! this insight to your nature almost reconciles me to my lot. Your sympathy will smooth the passage to my grave. And before that hour comes, you may even have learned to cherish an affection for me that shall serve to keep my memory sacred in your heart."

But at this unexpected address, she rises quickly, and stands at a little distance from him.

"Never! Valence, let us understand each other plainly. You said just now that

people should not enter life together professing to feel more than they do. I feel nothing for you now—except a great aversion."

"An aversion! Are you, then, afraid of me?"

"Not of you, but of the life that is opening before me. I desire it—and yet I dread it. I see no other prospect; I know of no other path I wish to tread—and yet I would rather be dead at once than enter it. There is but one comfort in the future; I am fulfilling my father's wishes, and keeping up the name of the family. And that is my only reason for marrying you."

"A poor prospect of happiness," he says, with a pale face.

"Do you look for happiness?" she answers, shrilly. "I never have. I am sorry for you, and sorry for myself, and I wish it had been otherwise—but nothing more. You want the money, and so do I. Let us consider it a fair bargain, that, in order to enjoy fortune, we must be worried with the presence of each other."

"By all means," he answers, calmly. "But in justice to myself, Everil, I must tell you that, were it possible for me to secure your money to you without imposing upon you also the curse of a loveless marriage, I would go back to my barren acres to-morrow, and spend the remainder of my life alone, sooner than do you such a wrong."

"Then you are better than I am, you see," she retorts, with a hard laugh. "I like my money. I have been brought up in the lap of luxury, and I cannot make up my mind to part with everything that I have been accustomed to. And so I consent to my father's wish that I should marry you, without one thought whether I like you or not. All my object is to keep my money."

"I cannot believe but that you do yourself injustice," he answers, sadly. "That you should find it hard to give up your fortune to me is natural; but, putting all idea of liking or affection on one side, Everil, surely you would not marry me if you did not feel that you could at least respect me?"

"I should marry you, under the circumstances, if you were a Chimpanzee," she replies, her reckless spirit of defiance in the ascendant.

"Thank you—that is quite enough,"

says Lord Valence as he turns away. "We understand each other perfectly now, and the terms on which we are to be bound together for life. Poor child! how I pity you! But it will not be for long; and if it is in my power to make you do so, you shall speak and think differently of me at the close of our intercourse, Everil, from what you do at the beginning. Good-by. I shall probably go to town this afternoon *en route* for Ireland, and may not see you alone before that. Try and regard me as a friend until we meet again."

She is ready to weep and ask his pardon; but she presses her lips together, and lets him go without more than a languid farewell. Why should she not tell him the truth? He said himself that it was the

right thing to do. And now that they understand each other, all will be smooth and plain before them. Still it is provoking that his fine pale face and serious look and quiet manners should keep haunting her *for the remainder of the day*. She is quite sure she has done right in telling him her mind; but she would have felt much easier if he had flared up in consequence, rated her soundly, and given her a good cause for complaint. She is so miserable herself she would have felt a vicious pleasure in making some one else miserable also. But Lord Valence takes his departure without any further sign, and Everil West-Norman is left for a whole month to brood over her last interview with him.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVI.

"IT HAS COME AT LAST."

LORD VALENCE returns to Castle Valence, and it is not long before he has summoned his friend John Bulwer (who has been informed by letter of the intended marriage) to keep him company there.

"I shall have a whole month to myself, Bulwer, during which I must be looking after the old place, and seeing what I can do to brighten it up. These faded hangings are scarcely suitable for a lady's boudoir, are they? I have sent for Smart from Dublin, and shall put the whole thing into his hands. I think I am justified in spending more money in redecorating the castle than I can individually afford. It would hardly do to bring my cousin from so bright a home as Norman House to a place in this condition. And if you will take up your quarters here for a few weeks, you will be of the greatest possible service to me."

Bulwer is delighted to find his friend in such a hopeful mood.

"I would do anything to oblige you, old fellow. And I am so glad you have sent for Smart; he understands these things so well. The castle will look magnificent in a new suit of clothes. I hope you will have the library redone in crimson velvet. No other color or material would suit these stained windows and this oak furniture so well." They are standing in the library as he speaks.

"Bulwer! I cannot have the library touched."

"Not have the library touched! Why, it's the finest room in the house. If the countess has good taste, Valence, she will prefer it to any other."

"Perhaps!—but I could give it up to no one; and I would not have an ornament or fitting changed in it for the world. It is my harbor of refuge." And as he says so he glances round the room affectionately.

"Ah! it is evident you do not know what marriage is, Valence. Fancy a husband daring to keep a harbor of refuge! Why, if ever you presume to hint at such a thing,

your liege lady will have the walls pulled down about your ears."

"Do you think so?" with a startled look that makes Bulwer laugh. "But she could not occupy this room. No one would do so but myself."

"What nonsense! Have I not often sat in it?"

"But not alone, or after dark. You do not know what this room is after dark, Bulwer. Miss West-Norman could not bear it—or any one—except such as believe as I do, and are happy in their belief."

"Valence, my dear fellow, what are you talking about? I was in hopes you were going to get rid of all these dark mysterious fancies during your visit to England. Come—tell the truth. You thought little enough of them during your stay at Norman House?"

"I always think of them. They never leave me. They are part of my existence."

"And you have not shaken off the idea you communicated to me before your departure?"

"How I can I shake it off? It was not of my invention."

"Valence, will you not tell me the authority for your belief? You speak to me in riddles; but I think that were you to drag your notions to the light, you would find them melt into thin air."

"Some day, perhaps, but not now."

"Why not now? We have plenty of time at our disposal."

"I dare not without ascertaining—with-out asking—"

"The leave of whom? Not Mrs. West?"

"O dear, no! I am bound to Agatha by no bond but affection for my dear brother's memory."

"I am glad to hear it. Who, then, is the individual whose permission you must obtain before confiding in your truest friend?"

The earl is silent.

"Valence, forgive me if I pain you by alluding to a subject you have already denied. But, if during your long solitude here, you have become entangled in any romantic attachment which now embar-

rasses you, I entreat you, by the affection I bear for you, to tell me the truth, that I may be enabled to help you to free yourself. For, however painful it may be, you know that you must be free before this marriage takes place. You are too honorable a man to draw any woman into a marriage while there exists a secret between her and you which you would be ashamed to reveal."

"I am not ashamed of it," he answers, in a low voice.

"Then why not tell it me?"

But Valence has relapsed into silence; neither will he turn his face towards his friend.

"Is there a woman in the case?" says Bulwer, repeating his former question.

"There is not a woman in the case," replies the earl. "At least—O, I don't know what I am saying. You should not put such questions to me."

"And you would make that young girl your wife under such circumstances as these?" continues Bulwer, reproachfully.

"She does not care for the circumstances—or for me. We perfectly understand each other on that point. And I think I am justified in keeping one room in the castle for myself. At all events, I am quite decided that I will not have the library touched."

"All right. You must please yourself in the matter," replies John Bulwer, as he moves a little away from him. He is vexed at his friend's obstinacy, and shocked at his apparent want of principle. He has always looked on Lord Valence as a species of saint amongst men—a Sir Galahad of the nineteenth century. But he shall think so no longer. He is no better than his fellows—perhaps he is worse; for a dreamy life of inertia is one of the bluntest weapons with which to cut down the hydra-headed temptations that assail every one in this world, from the student in his closet to the king upon his throne. Yet he had such faith in Valence! This unsatisfactory conclusion to their conversation makes a slight coolness between the young men, and Bulwer finds it impossible to dilate on the coming marriage and consequent festivities in such flowing terms as he had done before. Interest flags; long silences reign between them, and the guest seeks his chamber somewhat early. But after having had a pipe at the open win-

dow, and duly reflected on what had passed, Bulwer comes to the conclusion that he had no right to try and force the confidence of his friend, and that it will be more becoming of him to tell him so before he retires to rest. So, habited in his dressing-gown and slippers, he steals out of his room, and, crossing the corridor to Valence's bed-chamber, taps at the door. There is no response. Bulwer pushes the door a little way open. Candles burn on the table, but the apartment is empty. The earl must still be in the library. As Bulwer descends the staircase and traverses the hall, he finds that the castle is shut up, and the servants have gone to bed; for there is little inducement in so lonely a spot for any one to keep late hours. No light streams from the library threshold. He essays to turn the handle, but the door is locked; yet as he does so he hears the sound of talking from within, and stands aghast as the sweet sad tones of Valence's voice fall on his ear.

"*Isolal Isolal!*" (in a tone of the deepest entreaty) "*speak to me! Tell me that I have done what is right!*"

Bulwer has not been accustomed to play the part of an eavesdropper. He is an honest, straightforward man, who is not afraid to say what he means, nor to ask information concerning that in which he may be curious, and his first impulse is to leave the spot.

He obeys it. He walks up stairs again, feeling very anxious to learn the truth, and very downcast at the discovery that there is any truth to learn; but quite convinced, meanwhile, that, until Valence chooses to repose confidence in him, he must remain in the dark. But he cannot prevent curiosity worrying him until he goes to sleep. Who can it be that Valence was addressing?

"*Isolal Isolal speak to me! Tell me that I have done what is right!*"

What can be plainer than that he was conjuring some woman to whom the announcement of the coming marriage has proved a blow, to assure him that he could not have acted otherwise? And this after he had positively denied—once, if not twice—that there was any woman in the case.

Well might Bulwer think him no better than his fellow-mortals!

Isolal! He has never heard of such a

name in that part of Ireland before, and he scarcely believes it can belong to it. Yet there are so many fantastic names amongst the lower class of Irish, that it is not impossible. At any rate, he shall remember it, and do his best to solve the mystery. It is not likely that any one could often come and go to and from the castle without attracting notice. If "Isola" is not a novelty, some of the servants will recognize her identity. And if he can arrive at the truth, what then? Will Valence brook further interference? Bulwer doubts it; but still he is resolved, if necessary, to speak again. Valence must—shall listen to him. He can believe his dear old friend to be weak and thoughtless, but not wicked or dishonorable. He comes of too noble and unstained a pedigree for that; and when the probable consequences of his folly are pointed out to him, he will recognize the necessity of its relinquishment.

* * * * *

Bulwer descends to breakfast, grave and thoughtful; Valence meets him, too much annoyed at the contents of a letter that has just been put into his hand to notice his unusual mood.

"It is very provoking," he says, hurriedly. "Here is Agatha writing to tell me she is about to return to the castle, at the very time that I wish to keep it clear."

"Cannot you put her off?"

"She has not waited for my decision, but intends to cross to-night. There is no time to stop her. What can have induced her to change her mind?"

"Had she made other arrangements, then?"

"I thought so. When I left Norman House it appeared to be a settled thing that she was to remain with my cousin until the wedding was over. It is far more suitable she should do so. Miss West-Norman has no female relatives near her, and of course there will be a lot of preparation going on. Added to which, I wanted the castle to myself just now."

"You are not so fond of Mrs. West's company as you used to be, Valence."

"O yes, I am. She is an excellent little creature, quite devoted to me and the boy, and of the greatest possible use as a housekeeper. And she has been accustomed to look on the castle as her home for so long now, that I should miss her presence greatly. But I don't want her just now.

You and I should have got on, bachelor-fashion, well enough whilst all these workmen are about; but a lady's presence will cause some degree of formality, and spoil half our fun."

Bulwer thinks so, too, but it is not his place to say so; neither would it be of any use, as the widow must already have accomplished one-half of her journey. But he notices that when Valence communicates the intelligence to Mrs. Driscoll, who comes in to clear away the breakfast, the old housekeeper appears to dislike the idea as much as he does.

"Whatever Mrs. West can want to come back, a-fussing and a-rummaging, at this time, when our hands are as full as they can be," she observes, in confidence to Bulwer, as her master leaves the room, "I can't make out. But there!—some people must always have their fingers in the pie, never mind how many cooks there is to look after it."

Mrs. Driscoll is smoothing the tablecloth into the neatest of folds as she speaks, and seeing how unnecessarily particular she is over it, Bulwer conceives she would have no objection to a little conversation with him.

"She cannot expect to be very comfortable with workmen about the place," he says; "and I expect she will wish herself back at Norman House before long."

"It wont be my fault if she don't," replies Mrs. Driscoll, with acerbity; "and I hope our new lady will see it in the same light as I do."

"You have never seen the future Lady Valence, have you?"

"No sir, I haven't; but they tell me she is a real beauty, and as proud as she's beautiful. I only hope she'll make his lordship happy, poor dear, for he deserves it if ever gentleman did—though I doubt if he'll live long to enjoy that or anything," says the housekeeper, with her apron to her eye.

"Mrs. Driscoll—he is not ill?"

"Well, not ill exactly. And yet I don't know. He's very bad in his head, poor gentleman, and has been all along, as every one about him can say; and the dreadful things as go on in this house, sir, words couldn't tell you of them; and it's a wonder that anybody can bear to stay here—and no more they wouldn't if they hadn't loved him, boy and man, as their own."

"I wish you could tell me, Mrs. Driscoll—" commences Bulwer, earnestly.

"Don't ask me, sir, for I couldn't tell you nothing more—not if I was dying; and it's only the Lord above as knows all. And if I thought the lady as is coming could win him from such dark deeds, why, I'd bless her on my bended knees, that I would." And Mrs. Driscoll prepares to depart.

"Stay one moment. Just tell me this. Have you ever heard the name of *Isola*?"

The woman starts and looks round, as though she expected to find the "old gentleman" at her shoulder.

"Lord sakes, sir, don't say that name! And wherever you can have heard it I cannot imagine!"

"Never mind where I heard it. To whom does it belong, Driscoll?"

"If you were dying this very minute, sir," replies the housekeeper, with a look of the utmost solemnity, "and my answering of your question was the way to bring you to life again, I couldn't speak it—not if ten thousand wild horses were ready to trample me under foot the very next minute." And before he can remonstrate with her, she is gone.

* * * * *

Mrs. West arrives to her time, very overburdened with child, servants and baggage, very tired with her long journey, and very much surprised to find she is not entirely welcome; but sweet—O, so sweet!

"My dearest Valence," she says, in a little cooing voice, when the earl has told her rather plainly that her presence at the castle is likely to prove inconvenient to him, "how I wish you had explained this to me before. Is it likely I should have come against your wishes? I guessed the place would be full of paint and whitewash; but I thought—I *hoped*, at least," continues Agatha, with a deprecating air, "that I might have made things a little less unpleasant to you."

This humility makes the earl look ashamed of his candor.

"O well, well! The benefit is all on my side, of course—I know that. But I am afraid you will be so uncomfortable. I expect we shall be pretty well knocked about from pillar to post during the next month."

"If you can stand it—with your health, Valence—why not I? But I will go back again if you wish it."

"Nonsense; you can't do that—at all

events, for the next week or two. But I suppose you will return before the first?"

"O, of course. Dear Everil has so much to arrange and to think of, she couldn't do without me. But I imagined you were alone, Valence, naturally," with a glance anything but kindly at John Bulwer, "and I couldn't bear to think—"

"Well, Agatha! Let us say no more about it. It was like your usual goodness to me to come over, and I only hope you may not regret it. You are very tired, and must want rest. Dinner is not till seven. Had you not better see to your rooms being made as comfortable as they can be before then?"

The meal passes harmoniously, but the sense of freedom is gone, and Bulwer begins to consider whether he had not better return to his own home until the widow shall have recrossed the channel.

After dinner they retire as usual to the library, which is also the acknowledged smoking-room of the establishment. The earl sits down to play one of his dreamy melodies on the piano; Agatha ensconces herself in a chair by his side; Bulwer takes possession of a lounge near the open window, and soothes his solitude with a cigar. The soft balmy breath of the summer air, the hum of the insects busy amongst the eaves round the casement, the fast-falling dusk, combined with the effects of an excellent dinner, join issue to lull him off to sleep, and before he knows what is coming he is in the land of dreams. A confused vision of Valence being in some extreme danger, and calling out to him to save him, whilst Mrs. West, transformed into a huge scaly serpent, writhes in folds between them, and prevents him coming to the rescue, causes him to wake up, confused and half conscious where he is. The room is wrapt in gloom, and the first sound that recalls him to himself is the widow's voice.

"You didn't see her?"

"I spoke to her, and she promised to be here to-night. Will you be present?"

"I had better not. It may prevent her coming."

"What! when she loves you so, and knows you are in my secret? Dear *Isola*! Do stay with me, Agatha."

"No, not to-night—I am tired," Mrs. West is saying when John Bulwer comes completely to himself.

"Valence, I am awake!" he exclaims, suddenly.

The earl and his sister-in-law both rise in some confusion and come forward.

"Are you, old fellow?" says the former. "Well! then we will ring for candles, though it always seems a shame to me to shut out the half-light in these lovely summer evenings."

"Don't send for candles for me," cries the little widow, as she extends a hand for Mr. Bulwer's acceptance, "for I am so dreadfully tired I am going straight to bed."

"In that case, Bulwer, you and I will have a cigar on the terrace together. What a moon!—that bodes fair weather for the haymaking to-morrow."

They step out of the library window and pace up and down beneath the castle walls. The moat is covered with water-lilies; its banks are clothed with ferns and scarlet geranium; from the meadows beyond the powerful scent of the cut grass is borne towards them on the evening air; every living thing is hushed and silent. It is an hour for confidence and confession. And yet, though Bulwer never felt more strongly drawn towards his friend than at this moment, never more inclined to entreat him to speak out, he cannot do it. He gazes at the earl's delicate profile, looking almost unearthly in its beauty beneath the moonlight, and feels as though he could brave anything to rescue him from the fanciful and mysterious train of living into which he appears to have been drawn. But there is something in the expression of his face which forbids his speaking—as though his thoughts had been altogether parted from this world, and any commonplace allusion to them would be an insult. And so they speak of mundane matters—of the coming harvest, the shooting prospects, the wedding tour—whilst their minds are severally far away from the subject under discussion. When they reenter the castle Bulwer tries to persuade the earl to go to bed; but he refuses steadfastly; he has work to do yet, he says.

"Don't you sit up rather too late, Valence?" urges his friend. "I was rambling about these passages at midnight yesterday, and found, to my surprise, that you had not yet retired."

"How could you tell? Was the library lighted?"

"It was not, which astonished me, for I heard the tones of your voice as if in conversation with some one. Do you carry on your studies in the dark, Valence?"

The earl looks annoyed.

"Sometimes—not always—that is to say, when I am working out a problem I rather prefer darkness to light. You must have overheard me thinking aloud. It is a bad habit I have fallen into. But I wish you would not leave your room in search of me, Bulwer. It is to avoid the possibility of disturbance that I remain up after the rest of the household are in repose."

"I will not, if you desire me; but I wish I could persuade you to retire also. You are not strong, Valence, and these late hours are killing you."

"It is not they that are killing me," replies the earl, in a low voice; and no more passes between them on the subject. Bulwer goes up to his room and to bed. He lies awake for some time, meditating on all that he has heard that evening, and trying to unravel the mystery of Mrs. West's fragmentary conversation and the earl's own remarks.

Can it be possible that his sister-in-law is in Valence's confidence, and encourages his want of faith to his betrothed wife? Bulwer has always disliked and distrusted Agatha; but he can hardly believe her to be so worthless and unwomanly as this. That she has some sinister design in making herself necessary to Valence he is certain, and some day he hopes to see it brought to light; meanwhile, however, he tries to persuade himself that, if she knows and approves of the visits of the mysterious "Isola," there can be nothing wrong in them.

At last he falls into an uneasy slumber, with his bedroom door left open. How long he sleeps he is unable afterwards to say; but he is awakened by the sound of a scream, followed by two or three hollow groans, and then the cry of "Agatha! Agatha!"

He dashes out of bed and into the corridor, in time to intercept the figure of the earl, who, with staring eyes and dishevelled hair, is flying, like Orestes from the Furies, in the direction of his own apartment. Bulwer receives him in his arms. The young man clings to him almost spasmodically—his breath is short and hurried—his face and hands are damp with per-

spiration—he does not seem to recognize him, or to know of what he is speaking.

“Agatha!” he says, imploringly, as though he would shield himself behind her from some impending danger, “it has come at last! She has spoken. It will all be over now. Ah!—my God! how short a time!—how short!”

“Valence, my dear fellow, what is the matter? Who has alarmed you?” says Bulwer, almost roughly.

“Ah! Bulwer, is it you? Why did you ever advise me to marry? But stay, I forgot—you know nothing.”

“Not unless you will tell me; but I am waiting to hear. Do you feel ill?”

“No, no—at least, not now. It was the first shock. What must you think of me?” says Valence, as he tries to stand upright and pull himself together.

“But you must have seen something to throw you into this condition.”

“Seen something! I saw herself—in all her magical beauty; but I must not speak of it. I entreat you not to ask me any more questions. Where is Agatha? I want to see her.”

“I do not know. I conclude she is in her room, to which she retired so many hours ago. You had better go to yours now, Valence. It will alarm her, if she wakes, to find you thus.”

“Yes, yes—of course I will; but I must go down stairs again first.”

“I will not hear of it,” says Bulwer, determinately, as he holds back the earl, now as weak as a child. “You have had enough of that confounded room for to-night; and so long as I can prevent you, you shall not return to it.”

“Very well,” replies Valence, with a faint smile; “then take me to my own, old fellow, for I don’t believe I can stand.”

Bulwer, doing as he is asked, assists him to undress, and finds, to his consternation, that he has scarcely an article of linen on him that is dry.

“I cannot imagine *what* can have thrown you into such a state of terror as this,” he observes, as he removes his clothing. “You are doing an injury to yourself and to your friends, Valence, by keeping it a secret.”

“O, it was *nothing*—positively nothing,” replies the earl, who is sufficiently recovered to be very much ashamed of the commotion he has caused. “I ought to be

used to it by this time; but it came rather suddenly to-night. I wish I could see Agatha.”

His wish is gratified—Mrs. West is even then peeping in at the open door.

“May I come in, Mr. Bulwer? O my dear Valence! what is this? I was awakened by a horrible scream, and a noise in the passage. I hope you have not been disturbing our friend here.”

“Agatha, it is fixed!—she has fixed the time. It is all settled. There is nothing more to learn.”

“Hush!” replies the widow, in a prolonged tone of caution, as she places her hand upon his head. “Be quiet, Valence! You don’t know what you are talking about.” And then she stoops and whispers something in his ear.

“I didn’t think of that,” is his resigned and languid answer, as he staggers towards his bed.

“Hadn’t we better leave Lord Valence to repose?” says Agatha, sweetly, to John Bulwer.

“Will he be able to sleep?”

“O, no doubt of it; and if not, I am close at hand, you know, and used to manage him during illness. You will call me if you want anything, dear Valence?”

“I shall want nothing,” he answers, in a drowsy tone.

“He is half asleep already, you see. He is always very lethargic after these little attacks. He will want nothing further from either of us to-night, Mr. Bulwer.”

And, following the suggestion of her movement, Bulwer quits the room with her.

“What is the matter with him?” he demands, anxiously.

She taps her forehead.

“Good heavens! you cannot be in earnest. It is too terrible.”

“Every one knows it, my dear Mr. Bulwer.”

“Except, I suppose, Miss West-Noi man.”

“Indeed you are mistaken. She knows it as well as I do.”

“And still consents to marry him?”

“My dear sir, you are very much behind the world, or you would know that a coronet is large enough to cover any amount of disease. But he is young, and he may get over this.”

“Meanwhile, ought he to be allowed to

Indulge these unhealthy fancies of his?" "Ah, that is a question I cannot answer. He will not brook control, nor do I know how it might affect him; but he is under Dr. Newall's care, and I do my best, you may depend on it."

Bulwer cannot answer as heartily as he is evidently expected to do. He cannot trust the widow, even on the evidence of her own smooth tongue; nor can he quite understand why, since she was awakened by his scream, she did not come to the assistance of her brother-in-law sooner. He sees that, although she wears a white wrapper, she is completely dressed underneath, and her hair is neatly wound about her head. Would a woman accustomed to be called up at night in so terrible an emergency as a sudden disorder of the brain, be likely to do her hair before rushing into the presence of the invalid? John Bulwer wishes her good-night and unbroken rest with every appearance of respect; but he keeps on pondering on the marvel of her tardy and unusual appearance long after she has lost all consciousness of his existence or her own; nor does he ever forget it afterwards.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EARL'S DIARY.

"I WRITE from Baden-Baden. I have been married to my cousin Everil for three weeks past. It is not a cheerful thing to marry a woman who does not care for you, and who has plainly told you so. My friend Bulwer seemed to imagine that the mere fact of the possession of a bright, amiable and accomplished wife would turn the current of my ideas into another channel, and make me once more in love with life. Fortunately for me, his notion has not proved correct. To fall in love with what he must inevitably, and in a very short space of time, resign, is not to be desired for any man; therefore I am thankful to say that I preserve my old feelings on the subject. Not that my wife is at fault. She conducts herself, and has from the day I married her, in every respect as I should wish her to do. It is I only who am to blame—I, who cannot disentangle my mind from the web of past and future fancies that envelops it, and take my place in the present like other men.

"And yet there are moments when she has drawn me out of myself, and I have thought that if she loved me, she might almost have the power to make me regret what is in store. What a good thing it is for me that she has not the power—nor ever will have. We are both of gentle blood—we have both naturally amiable dispositions; therefore, for the few months we shall spend together, we shall jog on smoothly, I have little doubt, without coming to any open rupture. But she will never forget that I fulfilled my engagement with her from a sense of duty, nor that—'under the circumstances, she would have married me had I been a chimpanzee.' How I wish I could forget that phrase! It recurs to mar my most peaceful moments.

"How cold, and calm, and grandly beautiful she looked upon our wedding day! I had not seen her for a month; for the last interview we held together had jarred upon my feelings—wounded my vanity, Bulwer would say—and, not caring to risk a renewal of it, I arrived at Norman House so late on the night of the thirty-first, that she had already retired to rest. The place was, of course, full of relatives and friends; but I had taken Bulwer over with me to act as best man, and made him promise to stick to me until the ceremony was over. As my cousin came up the chancel of the church between her guardians, I saw him give a start of surprise. 'Gods!' he exclaimed, 'what a lovely woman!'

"I looked at her; she did appear most beautiful; but she never raised her eyes to greet me by so much as a glance. I took her passive hand, and led her to the altar. She repeated the words which were given her to say mechanically. I felt that I was marrying a statue. When the subsequent conventional and soul-harrowing ceremonies of breakfast, speeches and congratulations had been gone through, and I found myself en route with my wife to the railway-station, I ventured to speak to her. I was feeling rather excited by that time. The good wishes had poured in on me so fast, I almost believed them; and Bulwer's eyes, moistened with earnestness as he had the farewell words and the last shake of our hands, were still dwelling in my memory.

"'Everil,' I said, 'I hope you will never regret this.'

"'I have no fear of it,' she answered.

"If we are not lovers," I went on, "we are at least cousins—the children of brothers who were warmly attached to one another, and whom I know we have made happier for what we have done to-day. Blood is thicker than water, Everil."

"They say so."

"This fact may make our enforced intercourse smoother than it would otherwise have been; and you know the circumstances under which you marry me."

"I wish you wouldn't allude to them."

"I would not did you not affect to doubt them. But you do not seem to believe what I say concerning my—"

"Her face grew a shade paler."

"I do believe it; but the subject is unpleasant to me."

"Not for my sake?"

"For all our sakes."

"I looked at her keenly, but could trace no feeling in her face but that of weariness. I took her hand."

"Believe also, Everil, that whilst I remain here I will try and make you happy."

"Thank you."

"It was all the show of affection I could extract from her; and as she was that day she has remained to this. Not proud nor repulsing, but quiet, stately, and perfectly calm. I see the eyes of both foreigners and Englishmen follow her in her walks; and I constantly hear inquiries made as to who she is and where she comes from. I confess, at such moments, to feeling a slight sensation of pride that she bears my name, the fact that she is of my own blood being sufficient explanation for this. The impetuous domineering hoyden whom I first met at Norman House seems entirely to have disappeared, and few people, I think, would believe at this moment that Lady Valence could row a boat, or drive tandem, or ride to hounds. Yet—so unconscionably hard are we mortals to please—I am not quite sure if I prefer her present mood to her former one. She did a great many things I disapproved of; she certainly at times overstepped the bounds of decorum; her plain-speaking occasionally amounted to rudeness—and yet there was more life about her than there is now. To see her descend to the breakfast-room each morning perfectly dressed—to watch her reading quietly, or thinking to herself by the hour together—to accompany her in a formal drive—to hear her say at dinner that she has enjoyed

herself, knowing all the while that she eats little, sleeps little, and smiles less—may be very befitting the Countess of Valence, but is so unlike Everil West-Norman that I scarcely recognize the same woman. Meanwhile, I cannot help thinking, naturally, that I have something to do with this great change, and interfere with her, in consequence, as little as may be. I see she dislikes me; I think she fears me with a mysterious dread that hardly knows of what it is afraid. What can I do but leave her as much as possible to herself, and strive, by giving them in solitude all the opportunity to communicate with me that they can require, to keep the influences that surround me from affecting her? There is antagonism between them; but they still insist (my father especially) upon the fact that eventually Everil will love me. If this be true or likely, ought it not to form an additional reason for my avoiding her company? *To love me!* Poor child! there is not much sympathy between us; but were you my worst enemy I could not wish you a sadder destiny. No! whatever happens, Heaven grant that *that* may be the last thing that enters your imagination!

* * * * *

"I remained abroad nearly three years; and when, on coming of age, I returned from my foreign travels to take up my residence at Castle Valence, spirit-rapping and table-turning had just *come into fashion*—a strange term to use for what was either a great lie or an immortal truth; but it is the right one. Rumors had reached England, chiefly from America, that if a sufficient number of persons sat round a table, with joined hands, raps would sound from its surface that might be used, by means of spelling over the alphabet, for answering questions, and that the table would, in all probability, also perform certain antics that would prove very amusing to the spectators. Amusing! yes, that was the proper word. The idea took. It has always been difficult to find employment for one's guests at a mere evening party. Cards are out of date; *les jeux innocents* are only acceptable to the young, and music is seldom pleasing to any one but the performer. Table-turning came in as a pleasant pastime in which all might join; and it became a constant practice to form a circle at a moment's notice. Neither sex, age nor disposition was taken into consideration. The young

and the old, male and female, serious and gay, moral and immoral, were herded together at any time, in any place, and the consequences were no one knew whether to believe what succeeded was caused by some invisible agency, their own power, or trickery. The movements of the table were accompanied by shrieks of laughter; the silliest questions were answered at random; and it was only now and then that something startling occurred, and was generally followed by the more serious sitters declaring they would never have anything to do with table-turning again. The majority ridiculed it as folly; a few believed it to be by some agency of the devil; but no one ever seemed to derive any satisfaction from meddling with it. I was not, and I never have been, in the habit of mixing with society; but I heard all this from friends, and it disgusted me. I could not imagine any one with the least claim to common sense wasting his time over such an employment. If table-turning proceeded from the mere force of animal magnetism, it was less instructive than the simplest game; if from the power of the spirits of evil, it was more dangerous than the most open sin. After the wonderful manifestations which I had witnessed, both in Spain and Italy, it appeared puerile to me in the last degree; I could not endure the mention of the subject, and lost patience when it was even alluded to. Yet I never relinquished the intense yearning I had experienced ever since visiting Bianca's *salon* in Florence, to communicate with my father again; and hour after hour did I sit in my library, with the door locked, my pen in my hand and paper before me, in hopes that he might come to me as he did to her, and send me another message of identity and consolation.

"As I was thus sitting one evening, with my elbows on the table and my thoughts far away from earthly matters, I heard a faint sound under my right hand. At first it was like the ticking of a watch, and I took little notice of it; but presently it increased in intensity, and kept on tapping, not continuously, but at intervals of three strokes each, as though it wanted to attract my attention. I laid down my pen, pushed away the paper, and examined the writing-table, but could find nothing to account for the noise I had heard. I then placed my hands on the same spot, and after a while

the rapping recommenced, but much louder than before.

"My curiosity was excited. This was evidently the same species of power by which tables were turned and questions answered. I thought I should like to test its accuracy for myself. For the sake of ascertaining the truth, I professed to believe that it was a sentient being I was addressing, and asked it, if willing to communicate with me, to answer by giving three raps.

"The three raps were distinctly given.

"I became interested. If this were folly there was, at all events, no witness to it but myself; and if I proved it to be so, no harm would be done. The following conversation then ensued:

"'Are you a spirit?'

"My question was answered by three more raps, which I interpreted as 'Yes.'

"'Will you answer me by means of the alphabet?'

"'Yes.'

"'What is your name?'

"Here I ran over the letters of the alphabet, and the reply was spelt out, '*Your father Valence.*'

"I stopped and trembled. Should I go on or not? That name so sacred to me, overcame my courage. I could not bear it should be trifled with—that I should be either deceiving myself or receiving communications from some other source. But as I remained silent and irresolute, the tapping from that invisible hand, now very gentle and continuous, seemed to grow impatient of my delay.

"'If you are really my father,' I cried at last, 'why do you not show yourself to me, or come and write, as you did through Bianca?'

"'Because I cannot,' was the answer. 'Your powers are great, but they require education. If you wish to read, you must begin at A, B, C.'

"'Does that mean that I must communicate with you first through the table?'

"'Yes.'

"'And that if I am patient, the rest will follow?'

"'Yes.'

"I could have wept with joy. To see my father again as I saw him on the night of his death, I would have shut myself up in that library for the rest of my life. I formed my plans, but told them to no one.

This, I have thought since, was a pity. But my brother Arthur (only one year younger than myself) had just been gazetted to his regiment, and sent to serve in England, and I was, comparatively speaking, alone. I was my own master, not only in the more important things of life, but also as regarded the minutes and hours on which society in that secluded castle made no demand. Consequently I commenced to spend the long evenings shut up in my room, in the company of no one but myself and the invisible friends I had learned how to make. I fathomed many strange things during my apprenticeship to the mysterious science that fathered the doctrines of Swedenborg, Mesmer and Allan Kardec, though my first experiences, I admit, were unsatisfactory. I was like a child playing with an engine, of the dangerous properties of which he has no idea; and, as my mediumistic powers rapidly developed, I found myself surrounded by a host of unseen individualities, chiefly strangers to me, who appeared to seek my presence more for the sake of keeping others away, than for any gratification they desired to give me or to derive themselves from our acquaintance-ship. It was as though I had thrown open the door of Castle Valence to the world, and found its halls peopled with all sorts of characters, as uninteresting to me as they were unprofitable. For this reason, for many months my own friends were prevented from communicating with me, or (as I subsequently learned) approaching me; and several times I was almost persuaded to abandon the whole project in disgust. But the subject had a fascination which I could not resist; the more so that I continued earnestly to study all such works, either in our own or in foreign languages, as treated of it. So, though often disheartened, and tempted to believe either that I was led captive by my external senses, or that some of the intelligences that surrounded me were what they stated themselves to be, I returned to their company again and again, and was at last rewarded for my perseverance, not only by effectually banishing from my table those with whom I had no wish to communicate, but receiving satisfactory evidence of the presence I had been working to entertain. It was in the sixth month of my solitary experiments that my father returned to me. He had at lengthy intervals spoken to me through the table,

but only in such words of promise as should encourage me to persevere. One evening I was sitting at my writing-table, engaged in reading, when I commenced to feel drowsy. It was an unaccountable sensation, which I had never experienced before. It seemed as though some one, with a powerful but gentle hand, were pressing on the back of my head, so as to force it downwards. At the same time my eyelids became heavy, as though weighted with lead. I describe the feeling from subsequent impressions, as at the time I became so rapidly unconscious as to be unable to notice what took place. It was irresistible, and in a few minutes I was fast asleep. How long I remained so I cannot say—perhaps an hour—but I woke under three forcible impressions; a sensation of bewilderment, amounting to fear—a striking sense of cold—and a feeling of emptiness, as though half my life had been drawn away from me.

"I opened my eyes slowly and wearily, not knowing for the first moment where I was; but there stood my lamp—here were the pens, the ink, the paper—all the familiar objects with which I was usually surrounded—and I saw that I was in my own room.

"But what was this? Beneath my hand there lay a sheet of foolscap, closely written over in the same handwriting which had proceeded from Bianca's pen, and which I had faithfully preserved since then. How could it have come there? As the probable truth flashed on my mind I started up, and seizing, read it. Yes! my suspicions were correct—here at last was what I had been waiting and longing for—a written message from my father. I need not transcribe it. It is sufficient to say that it was as affectionate as my heart could wish, as convincing as my mind could desire, and that I prized it as a voice from heaven. I perceived then what had occurred. I had been entranced, and this wonderful message from the so-called dead had been produced through my own agency whilst in that condition. I rose and staggered to my bedroom, feeling very much like a drunken man, but happier than I can express, with joy that at last I had found the bridge of communication that unites sphere to sphere, and makes all the children of the Eternal Father, from the first spirit he breathed into a mortal frame to the last he shall ever create, into one family, separated

only by the prison bars that shut our spirits in, until the time for their deliverance.

"From that evening I made rapid progress. I left off all communication with the unseen world excepting through my pen, and it was a common occurrence for me to find I had been entranced three and four times a week. It became almost a habit with me, especially when my nerves were powerfully moved or excited.

"I have been told since that this was very injurious to my health; but I had no one to advise me then, and it is of little consequence now.

"I had always been fond of music, and very sensitive to the effects of it; but had never learnt to play any instrument, nor did I call myself a musician. I kept a piano and harmonium in my room, however, just to amuse myself with when no one was by to listen to me; and it was not long before I was informed that if I would give myself up to it, I should be moved to play under inspiration better than I could do by any amount of practice. I told them they might do what they liked with me; and I believe I was often entranced when at the instrument, though what happened then I am, of course, unable on my own authority to relate. They keep up the practice in some measure, however, to this day; and, although I am seldom totally unconscious, my friends constantly inform me how 'delightfully and splendidly' I have been playing, when I have not the least remembrance of it myself; for which reason I always refuse to play in public.

"Having cultivated the writing and musical mediumship for about a year, I commenced to see the influences that guided me. Never shall I forget the first moment that I stood face to face with a spirit! It was past midnight—I had been sitting all the evening as usual by myself, and began to think it was time I retired to rest. I had ascended the first half of the staircase, when— * * * * *

"These tiresome trances! I do not mind how often I am affected by them when alone; but it is too bad that I should frighten her. I had taken the opportunity of her absence yesterday afternoon to write up my diary. It was a lovely day, and she had gone for a walk in the avenue. I drew my table to the window, and sat writing there.

"Why I should have been influenced on that occasion I am not aware; but when I

came to myself I was lying on the floor. I always know when I wake from a trance—it is quite different from waking from sleep. I guessed at once what had occurred, and gazed round in my bewildered fashion before rising. Something detained me. I looked up; it was Lady Valence, and I was supported by her arms. She was kneeling on the floor by my side bending over me. Her face was deadly pale.

"'Don't get up,' she said, in an agitated voice. 'You had better lie still till you are stronger.'

"'It is nothing,' I hope I have not frightened you, Everil.'

"'How can I help being frightened? I came in from my walk to find you lying on the ground unconscious; have you fainted?'

"'I suppose so. The day is sultry. But I must be tiring you,' I answered, though it was very pleasant to feel those soft firm arms beneath my head.

"'No, I am not tired; only it alarms me to see you ill. May I send for a doctor?'

"'Certainly not! These attacks are very common with me. I'm afraid you must get used to finding me lying on the floor.'

"'But he might prevent recurrences.'

"'I assure you he would have no power to do so. I know perfectly well from what they proceed, and I feel none the worse—thank you.' Saying which, I rose to my feet, and threw myself rather blindly on the sofa. She stood by the table twisting about her parasol, and looking uncertain what she should do next.

"'Everil?'

"'Yes.'

"'Don't blame me for bringing this discomfort on you. I warned you it must be.'

"'I do not blame you; only—why not have a doctor?'

"'It would be useless, my dear, and it would worry me.'

"It is the first time I have ever addressed her by an endearing appellation. Not that I have felt disinclined to do so; but her manners have been too formal and distant to encourage such familiarity on my part. But she did not resent it even by a look. Perhaps she did not notice it; for, as she gazed thoughtfully across the table and out of the open window, I saw that tears were standing in her eyes.

"'Nothing short of a great alarm would make Everil cry—or, at least, from what I have seen of her, I should think so.'

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"DO YOU SUPPOSE I BELIEVE IN SUCH NONSENSE?"

CASTLE VALENCE is refurnished and redecorated from basement to attic (always excepting the library, which the earl has given strict orders shall remain untouched), but the Dublin upholsterer has had too much good taste to alter the character of its fittings, and it still looks dark and gloomy in the eyes of its new mistress. She is introduced to it on a September evening, after a long and fatiguing journey, and the frowning walls of granite, with their feudal accessories of moat and drawbridge (which Lord Valence takes a pride in preserving) strike on her senses unfavorably. It is certainly a great contrast to the home she has left behind. Norman House is essentially modern. Its large plate-glass windows let in floods of light; its couches and divans are all of the latest fashion; the stands of flowers, the lace curtains, the gilding and coloring with which it is ornamented, serve to infuse an amount of life, and brightness, and cheerfulness about the place which Everil will look for in vain in Castle Valence. The tenants, who, notwithstanding his studious habits and complete ignorance of agriculture, love their young lord for his kind heart and gentle manner, have met the bride and bridegroom at the nearest town, and, with many shouts and much kicking up of dust from their horses' feet into their benefactors' faces, brought them home in style. At another moment Everil would have been amused and excited by this proof of popularity. She would have laughed at the energy of the little bare-footed Irish children who ran by the side of her carriage all the way, and sympathized with the expressions of kindness and good-will which emanated from every mouth; for she stands in the position of landlord herself, and knows how sweet it is to feel one's effort for the comfort of others have been appreciated. But to-day she can only feel that she is coming home, that the transitory distraction caused by

travelling in new scenes is over, and she must begin the world as Lady Valence. Fatigue has kept her silent for some hours past, and silence has induced thought, and thought has made her melancholy.

It is almost a pleasure to be fatigued and silent in the presence of one we love; it is so sweet to be able to brood over our happiness and to feel at peace; but silence is not golden when memory brings pain.

"There is the castle," exclaims Valence, as a turn in the drive brings the old building full in view. "What do you think of it, Everil?"

"It is very grand—much grander than I expected; but those narrow windows must make the rooms very dark. How old it looks. What is its date?"

"Sixteenth century."

"Quite feudal. It reminds one of James's novels. Have you many ghosts there?"

She asks the question jestingly, of course, and is surprised at the change that passes over her husband's countenance.

"Ghosts! How should I know? What made you think of such a thing? I hope you will not take any absurd fancies of that kind into your head, Everil."

"Why, you talk quite seriously. Do you suppose for a moment that I believe in such nonsense? You are very much mistaken. I am neither a fool nor a lunatic, but I give you leave to call me both when I credit such folly as the appearance of spirits."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," he answers, with a strange expression on his face; but before they have time for any further discussion on the subject the carriage has dashed over the drawbridge, and drawn up at the portcullised door.

Here the tenantry, mounted and otherwise, disperse to seek the refreshment provided for them; and Lady Valence, being led into a vast hall with a groined roof, the walls of which are covered with armor and the floor with skins, finds herself in the embrace of Agatha West.

"Such a happy occasion," murmurs the peachy-faced widow, as she anoints Everil's

cheek with kisses. "Everything to turn out just as we wished. It is too much. And my dear Valence"—turning to him—"how are you? Ah! not looking quite the thing, I am afraid. You are much thinner than when you went away."

"Let us talk of something pleasanter than my personal appearance, please," interposes Valence, hastily. "Everil is exceedingly tired, and I want to show her to her room."

"Now, my dear Valence, you will do nothing of the sort. If she is tired, what must you be? I dare say you have been up to all kinds of imprudence abroad, but now that you have come home again, I shall have to keep you in order. I will go up stairs with Everil, and you must sit down and rest yourself."

The earl makes some objection, but is overruled. The countess says nothing, but she moves slowly away in the direction of the staircase, and the widow follows her to the suite of apartments that has been prepared for her reception.

"Well, darling, and how have you enjoyed yourself?" is her first question, as soon as they find themselves alone.

"Quite as well as I expected to do."

"I hope dear Valence has not caused you any uneasiness?"

"In what way?"

"Well, by being ill, you know. His poor dear head is so weak at times, and he has such queer rambling fancies, that strangers don't understand him. But you must never be alarmed, my dear. If he should ever talk or act in a manner that seems incomprehensible to you, just tell me, and I will set him to rights again."

Lady Valence is either indifferent to Mrs. West's speech, or she does not like the tone of it.

"I am not easily alarmed, Agatha, and if Valence became ill I should consider the doctor the proper person to attend to him."

"Ah! there are some cases in which a doctor can be of no use."

"Then I think you would be less. But I shall make no further change in my dress to-night. Suppose we go down stairs."

"One moment, darling! Have you heard from home lately?"

"I found a letter from Alice waiting me in town yesterday."

"And they were all well?"

"She did not say anything to the contrary. Why?"

"No news of any sort?"

"None that would interest you."

"Ah! well; it doesn't signify, perhaps."

"What doesn't signify? Why cannot you speak out, Agatha? I hate innuendoes."

"But perhaps I oughtn't to mention it to you; and if you were like other women I shouldn't; but you are so strong, dear, and so brave; and you promised to be a friend to him—"

"What are you driving at?" demands Lady Valence; but as she puts the question she turns her face away.

"I had a letter last week from Lady Russell, about—you know whom?"

"Maurice Staunton, you mean?"

"Of course, dear (but what a wonderful woman you are to mention him so calmly). And I'm sure you'll be sorry to hear he's been very ill, poor fellow!"

"Very ill!" Her lip trembles slightly as she echoes the words.

"Very ill—so his sister says—with a kind of nervous fever, and has been obliged to get sick leave from his regiment for change of air."

"He is not coming here!" cries Everil, quickly.

"O no, dear, I hope not! But I know they have Irish connections in the neighborhood; and I thought it as well to prepare you, in case— But you wouldn't mind meeting him again; would you, Everil?"

"I should have a very decided objection to meeting him again. I desire, as I told you at Norman House, never to hear the subject of my past intimacy with him mentioned between us."

"But this is nonsense, my dear Everil. You are married. What harm can the poor boy do you now? And how can you be a friend to him so long as you are afraid to meet?"

"I am not afraid," says the countess, drawing herself up proudly; "but the notion is not pleasant to me. And, therefore, Agatha, I must beg, if you hear Captain Staunton has any intention of calling at Castle Valence, you will put your veto on it."

The widow shrugs her shoulders.

"It must be as you wish, of course, dear; but I can't say I understand your

motive; and, to say the least, it will look suspicious to every one who knows how intimate you were with him in your own house. Added to which, it is not very Christian, in my eyes, to draw a man on to a certain point, and then refuse even to see him or to speak to him, as if he had done some wrong."

"We will discuss the subject no more at present," replies Lady Valence, with kindling eyes. Her first impression was that she ought not under any circumstances to renew her intercourse so soon with Captain Staunton; but she thinks now that she must not decide till she has given the subject mature consideration, and made sure that her resolution does not proceed from the effects of wounded vanity.

"Perhaps it would be as well not," says Agatha; "but you will think over it, I am certain, and see the sense of what I say. We mustn't draw down any ill-natured remarks upon ourselves," she continues, confidentially, as she slips her arm through that of the countess. "That would never do; would it?"

* * * * *

When Lord Valence informed his wife that he wished his sister-in-law to continue to reside at Castle Valence, Everil, at once, fell in with his views upon the subject. She did not entirely trust Agatha, and many things in her conduct both puzzled and annoyed her—but she liked her society, and thought it would be a great source of comfort in her new home. She did not calculate on the widow having resided at the castle for so many years as to have come to be regarded almost as its mistress, nor did she imagine Mrs. West had sufficient assurance to think she could remain there after the earl's marriage in any light but that of a guest. But she has not returned home many days before she finds her presence a restraint and a nuisance. Not that she attempts to interfere with any of the countess's orders or arrangements—Agatha is far too clever to show anything like open fight. On the contrary, she is so diffident about offering advice, and so afraid that she is in the way, that her very humility disarms her antagonist at the moment she most wishes to use a weapon against her. She and her child are treated as members of the household; they always have been, and it is Everil's wish they always should be; the rooms, the attend-

ants, the grounds, the horses and carriages, are as much at their command as they are at her own; and had it ended here she would have been satisfied. But one thing Agatha will not give up, and that is her constant attendance on her brother-in-law. She is always with him, and even the earl's hints and remonstrances, unless they verge on absolute commands, cannot drive her away. Seek him at what hour of the day she will, Everil never finds him alone; and though her proud heart denies that she is disappointed, her manners show it. Once or twice she ventures to make a remark upon the subject to Agatha.

"And did you *wish* to be alone with him?" the little widow will exclaim, with wide-open eyes. "*Really!* How glad I am to hear it! But I didn't dream (how should I, under the circumstances, you know?) that you would desire such a thing. Poor dear Valence! If he were only in a condition to appreciate the change."

"What change? What nonsense are you talking?" with heightened color, Everil will reply. "I only mentioned it because you appear to give yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble on his account. He has his books and his writing; why can't you leave the man alone to enjoy them?"

"Ah, my dear, you don't know how inseparable we have been for the last three years; how we have studied and thought together. Not but what I am aware all that is over now, of course; still, if you *were not jealous*—"

"*Jealous?* I jealous of you and Valence! You must be out of your senses. What is it to me who sits with him? I have no desire to do so. Only the servants might think it strange, I should imagine; and I do not see why you should take such an unpleasant duty on yourself. But *chacun a son gout*."

"But it has been my duty for so long, I am quite used to it. And as to the servants, they know what poor dear Valence is, and that he requires a great deal of watching. But if you think I usurp your rightful place—"

"No, thank you; I should not fill it, even if you resigned it. I love air, and exercise, and sunshine too much to care to shut myself up in a musty old room morning, noon and night. And if you prefer Valence's company to mine—"

"O, my dear Everil, you know it is not

that! Do I not give up the company of my little Arthur also? But poor dear Valence never *has* been left alone, and—”

“Say no more about it, please. I like my own liberty too well not to wish every one else to be as free as I am. Good-by. I am just going for a ride across country.”

“By yourself?”

“Whom have I to go with? Valence does not offer, and I am sure I shall not ask him! Besides, I am not sure if he would approve of my pace.”

“What a pity you have not some gentleman friend to accompany you.”

“Perhaps I shall have by-and-by. Meanwhile, sitting at home will not produce him. But I am off. You will have two good hours to ‘moon’ undisturbed with Valence in the library; and should I be lucky enough to break my neck over some of these barbarous hedges, or sink up to my chin in a quagmire, you may yet have the chance of ‘mooning’ with him to his life’s end.”

“Everil, I wish you wouldn’t speak so heedlessly.”

“I speak as I feel, which is more than can be said for everybody,” replies the countess, as she breaks off the conversation to go for her ride.

But though she talks so lightly, she is very much annoyed. She does not care for Lord Valence, she tells herself (in proof of her utter indifference to all his goings-on) a dozen times a day; but still she thinks they might keep up a show of sitting and talking together, if it were only for decency’s sake. She does not *want* to enter his room; perhaps if he were to ask her, she would refuse to do so; but he might give her the option of choice. When they were abroad on their wedding tour, although they never played such a farce as to pretend to be fond of each other, they used to have some very pleasant conversations together, and once or twice she was quite beguiled into feeling interested in what he said. She would not mind even now (still, of course, for the sake of that decency which Lady Valence appears suddenly to have raised on a little pedestal) taking her work or her book and bearing him company in the dull, dark old room he seems so fond of—if he would ask her. But he has not asked her. On the contrary, each morning since their return he has retired to his sanctum directly after

breakfast, and only left it to attend to the claims of his agent or his bailiff, or his meals, never to seek his wife, or to ask her to join him there.

But Agatha has always managed to gain admittance. Somehow or other, as soon as her boy is disposed of in the garden, she is sure to sneak into the library, and Everil is too proud to call her thence.

If he—if she—has no more sense of what is decorous and due to her, the mistress of the house, than that, they may shut themselves up there forever. And the countess’s horse, a favorite bay which she has brought with her from Herefordshire, suffers from the thought.

When she reaches home again it is time to dress for dinner, and she does not meet her husband until the meal is on the table. The conversation she has held with Agatha, and the reflections that followed it, make her unusually cold and stiff with him, and he, resenting her mood, leaves her company as soon as is possible, and once more seeks his study.

Mrs. West goes up to the nursery to attend the nightly ablutions of her boy (whatever her designs or eagerness to execute them may be, she never neglects that duty), and the countess is left alone.

She throws a light shawl about her shoulders and walks up and down the terrace. How different is her present life to that she has left behind her. There was always some company staying at Norman House, to say nothing of the Mildmay family, who almost lived there; she has never known till now what it was to feel alone. But although the earl and herself have received several invitations to state dinner parties and balls to be given in their honor by the surrounding gentry, not a soul has called since her arrival, except in the most formal manner, and from a distance that will make sociability impossible. As Everil thinks of this and frets over it, she feels how little thankful she has been for the company of Alice Mildmay, or even of Miss Strong. Dear old Miss Strong! She has abused her advice, her injunctions, and the necessity of her presence ever since she first knew her, and looked forward to her own marriage as the period at which she would be emancipated from both; but just now she feels as if she would give a great deal to know Miss

Strong was waiting for her in the drawing-room.

"I suppose it is of no use waiting for Valence, so I shall go to bed," she says, an hour later, to Agatha in that same apartment.

"Well, I don't know, dear, I'm sure. Shall I ask him if he is ready?"

"By no means! He is not quite so infirm but what he can find his way up stairs when it pleases him. For my own part, I am sleepy. Good-night."

"Good-night, dear," says Agatha, meekly, and without offering to accompany her.

On gaining her bedroom my heroine finds she is not so sleepy as she thought, and dismissing her maid with an order not to reappear till she is rung for, lies down on the sofa with a book.

But she is restless and uneasy, and cannot compose herself. Valence *might* have come back to the drawing-room after dinner, if only to ascertain what she was about to do; but she supposes that living in such a place as Ireland makes men barbarians. Yet she cannot help wondering what it is he occupies himself with that appears so engrossing. If it is the business of his estate, she would be a far more competent adviser for him than his sister-in-law, because she has interested herself largely in the management of her own property, and knows a great deal about the relative positions and duties of landlord and tenant, and not a little (for a woman) on the subjects of agriculture and the profitable investment of land. She has never spoken to Valence of such things; perhaps he is unaware she has ever taken interest in them; but if he knew and approved of it she might be of service to him. She doesn't love him, and she never will; but, after all, she is his wife, and has incurred certain duties by becoming so. Would it not be as well, at all events, to let him see that if he requires a companion she has no objection to being one? It is not very late; she will just go down stairs again and bid her husband good-night, and say a word or two that shall convey her purpose to him. After all, he is not strong, and if what he and Agatha says should come true—

With Everil all is impulse. She has no sooner thought of the idea than she proceeds to put it into execution. She trav-

ers the long corridors and the broad staircase without interruption, and taps at the library door. No one answers. She tries the handle; the door is locked. She becomes impatient, and raps louder.

"Who is there?" demands Lord Valence.

"It is I, Everil. Let me in."

"Do you want anything particular?"

"Yes!"

He comes himself to the door and unlocks it; then stands across the threshold to prevent her entrance.

"Why cannot I come in?"

"I am engaged just now."

"Why, the room is all dark! Are you sitting without lights?"

"Yes."

"But for what reason?"

"I cannot explain to you. It is a fancy of mine. What is your business?"

"My business is to come into the library. I want to sit with you," she rejoins, her curiosity roused, and her feelings pliqued at one and the same moment.

"You cannot do that to-night. I wish to be alone. I heard you had gone to bed."

"Who told you so?"

"Agatha."

"Is she with you then?"

The earl hesitates a moment, then he answers, slowly, "Yes."

"With you now? And what are you doing in the dark together?"

"That I cannot tell you—at all events to-night."

At this juncture Mrs. West comes forward. She looks rather scared at facing the light in the hall, and her countenance wears a perturbed expression; but she smiles as sweetly as ever.

"My dear Everil, does it seem very mysterious to you?"

"Uncommonly so, and I am waiting for an explanation," replies the countess, coldly.

"As if there was any. As if there *could* be any. At least, that might not be told. Poor Valence is not feeling very well this evening, and prefers the darkness to the light, which seems to hurt his eyes. *Voilà tout*—you naughty girl."

"If you are not well, why don't you go to bed?" demands Everil of her husband, without heeding the widow's words.

"Agatha is mistaken. I am quite well—"

("You don't look so!" interposes Mrs. West, pathetically.)

"—but I have a fancy for sitting in the dark."

"Well, I have a fancy for it also," rejoins the countess, as she tries to push her way into the apartment. "I should like to try what it feels like; we will all sit together."

"You cannot enter. I do not wish it," says the earl, firmly.

"But I do. Please to let me pass."

"Agatha," exclaims Lord Valence, in a voice of entreaty, "not now! It must not be! Try and persuade her."

"Indeed, my dear Everil, you had better go back to your own room."

"I did not ask for your advice, Agatha. Keep it for Lord Valence, since he seems to value it so much."

"O, if I am to be made a subject of disension between you, I shall go," says the widow, in a tone of offence, as she makes a feint of passing the countess. But the earl restrains her.

"I cannot let you go yet. I require you. Everil is, I am sure, too sensible to make so small a matter a cause of difference between us. It is simply this," he continues, turning to his wife; "I have some mental study to prosecute, which I can do better in the dark than the light, and Agatha is helping me to work it out. You will not object to my absenting myself for another half hour, will you?"

"I should not object to your absenting yourself for the remainder of your natural life," says Lady Valence, proudly, as she turns away. "Pray continue your studies, Valence. You will never find me interrupt them again."

"O, but now you are vexed," exclaims the widow, "and putting quite a wrong interpretation upon everything. Dear Valence," she adds, coaxingly, "let her come in, and we will light the lamps again and have some music before we go to bed."

But the tone of remonstrance which is being exercised on her behalf stings the countess, already deeply wounded, into anger.

"How dare you plead with him for me!" she says, turning fiercely on Mrs. West. "I would not enter his room if he were to beg it on his bended knees, nor condescend to sit with him either in the dark or light. I had no feeling in asking it except

curiosity; I should have none in obtaining it, except the pleasure of getting my own way. If you can imagine for a moment that any other motive could actuate my request for Lord Valence's company, you must be as mad as he is." And without another glance at her husband, she sweeps proudly up the stairs.

Agatha turns to confront the earl; he has left her side. She strikes a light to seek him, and finds he has retired to the furthest end of the apartment, where he is sitting near a table, with his head leaning on his hands.

"As mad as he is," he repeats. "She has found it out already, then. And yet how could I have expected it to be otherwise?"

"You are so imprudent," says his sister-in-law; "you arouse suspicion by your conduct. Why could you not have let her come in?"

"I don't know. I was afraid! I am always afraid; but it is for her, not for myself. She would shrink from me so—if—*if she knew.*"

"She would laugh you to scorn, and call you every opprobrious epithet under the sun. Everil has no tolerance for opinions which differ from her own. She is rather—I won't say heartless, it sounds so unkind—but cold upon certain subjects. So I sincerely trust that she never *will* know."

"Not with my consent! I would guard it from her—with my life," he mutters.

"What is that you say, Valence?" demands the widow, quickly—she has not quite caught the last word, but she has strong suspicion of its import.

"I said that I would do anything to prevent Everil's guessing at the nature of my studies," he answers, rousing himself.

"You are wise then, for were she to discover it, you would have no peace; and she would bruise her knowledge far and wide."

The earl shrinks from the idea.

"Ah, yes, that must not be; but after it is all over—when I am gone, Agatha, you will try and persuade her that I was not quite so mad as she appears to think me?"

"My poor Valence! Yes! But why harp upon that miserable topic?"

"How can I help it? I think of it night and day. Six months, Agatha—only six months more, and then separation forever from the flesh I have inhabited for so short a time."

"But you will always be with us," murmurs the widow, sentimentally.

"Ay, as these are, but only to see perhaps that which will drive me shuddering away."

"What can he have meant by those last words?" thinks Mrs. West, when they have separated for the night. "I really do believe—but he *can't* be such a fool—that he is going to try and fancy himself in love with his wife."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE EARL'S DIARY.

"*'As mad as he is.'* If Everil only knew how deeply she wounded me by those words! But how should she know that my greatest horror, my greatest dread, is lest people should think me insane? that the fear of it would almost make me give up the pursuit of a science in which I have made so much progress, and shake off the influence which has afforded so much delight—if I could? But I cannot! Even for *her* sake—for the sake of a woman whose fate is linked with my own, to whom I should be a protector and guardian, a haven from the troubles and affrights of the world—I can no longer speak and act like other beings.

"This is terrible! For the first time I feel I have incurred an awful responsibility which should have been shared with no one, but must necessarily rebound on the head of my wife.

"She shuns me, I can see it plainly. Ever since that unfortunate evening when she caught Agatha and me holding a seance together in the library, and when, fearful of what she might see or hear, I refused her admittance, she has studiously avoided intruding herself on my presence. If I occupy one of the general sitting-rooms, she never enters it; if I look by chance into the apartment where she is sitting, she rises to leave. Before we returned home I hoped that if there was no affection apparent in her actions, antagonism had, at least, died between us; but do what I will now, I cannot draw our minds closer together. She takes long solitary rides and walks without letting me know either when she is about to start from home or to return to it. She sees me withdraw to the library without remark, nor does the absence of my sister-in-law ever provoke

an inquiry from her. And through it all her appearance and manner are more depressed and proudly cold, than angry or resentful.

"If this goes on I shall go mad, as really mad as Everil supposes me to be!

"Good heavens! when I remember her at Norman House, with the girlish hilarity that used to jar upon my feelings; the freedom of speech that used to shock my sense of decorum; the extravagant tastes; the rapid motion; the pretty womanly defiance that she opposed to every suggestion made for her welfare, I wonder where it has all gone to. She has the same advantages now that she used to enjoy in her maidenhood; her means are ample, and her will is law; she is surrounded by every luxury, and can be as headstrong, wild and willful as she chooses. But she chooses only to be silent and thoughtful. I watched her yesterday from my library window as she walked up and down the terrace that surrounds the moat. She wore a simple garden hat and a muslin dress, but she was looking beautiful. Her favorite dogs were leaping upon her, trying to attract her notice, yet she did not even speak to them, but paced backward and forward with her eyes bent upon the ground. How I longed to know of what she was thinking! and if one pitying thought of me mixed in her meditations—of me—shut out forever from the love of wife, or child, or home!

"Would she pity me if she knew all? Sometimes I feel a mad resistless desire to cast myself at her feet and make a full confession. She is so much stronger and braver than the ordinary run of women; surely she would sympathize, if she could not believe in me! But Agatha says it would be folly, and excite her ridicule instead of her interest, and I believe Agatha is right. Women know more of each other than we can do; and she has studied Everil's character closely. Were I to try and explain to her in an hour, that which it has taken me years to build up and believe in, she would naturally regard me as a fanatic or a fool. And, not thinking that Everil would have much toleration for either, I cannot afford to sink any lower in her esteem. A circumstance occurred the other night that greatly annoyed me. We had retired to rest early, and slept well. Towards one o'clock I was awakened by my wife hurriedly getting out of bed.

‘What is the matter?’ I demanded. ‘I do not know,’ she replied, in a voice that betrayed more excitement than alarm; ‘but I cannot sleep here to-night. There is something keeps rapping, and moving, and rustling behind the head of the bed, and the room seems filled with—I don’t know what!’

“‘It is nothing! You are not frightened?’ I said, earnestly.

“‘Frightened! No! Of what should I be frightened?—only it disturbs me, and I cannot rest. I shall lie down on the sofa in my dressing-room.’

“‘It is the heat of the weather,’ I argued. ‘I will open the window wider, and the cool air will send you to sleep. Do not go into the dressing-room.’

“She obeyed me mechanically, and lay down in her own place again. But in another minute she sprang up with a cry.

“‘I cannot stay here!’ she exclaimed, hurriedly. ‘I know there is something wrong in the room to-night. I could swear that I was touched upon the forehead.’ And without further parley she passed into the dressing-room, and remained there until the morning. When it was light she laughed at her fears (that is to say, ridiculed them—I wish she had laughed), and begged I would not mention them to Agatha.

“‘It was doubtless, Valence, as you suggested, the heat of the weather that has unstrung my nerves and made me fanciful. I should be vexed to have it attributed to any other cause, for I have the greatest contempt for anything like belief in the supernatural. In my idea, it is simply the offspring of a diseased or uneducated mind.’

“‘I will not mention the occurrence,’ I replied. And I have not. But I know the reason of it. I felt the influence even whilst she spoke, and have trembled ever since, lest it may acquire a power over her, only second to what it holds over myself. Are we not one? And am I not justified, at any cost, in saving Everil from a fate that has poisoned my own existence, even at the risk of never winning a love I should have to resign so soon?

* * * * *

“When I last wrote in this diary, I was about to describe my first interview with a spirit. How different it was from all I had imagined on the subject. I had heard of

apparitions appearing to mortals in various forms, but usually so like human creatures as to be unrecognizable until they had flown. Of such nature we may conclude were those mentioned in the Scriptures, such as the spirits that were sent to Abraham and to Lot; the spirit that wrestled with Jacob, and the spirit that succored Daniel in the den of lions. When Moses and Elias, also, appeared to the disciples they were in recognizable form. I concluded, therefore, in my ignorance, that all apparitions appeared from the very first in the semblance of the bodies they had borne on the earth, and that it was as easy for them to make themselves visible, as it was for us to see them. But I was to be enlightened.

“I had been sitting one evening writing, until both hand and brain were weary. I had been promised several times, that before long a certain female spirit (a stranger to me, excepting by communication through the table) would make herself visible, and I had been anxiously expecting her advent. She had given me a full description of her personal appearance, and many and many a time I had strained my eyes into the darkness, hoping to discern the small features and fair hair which ‘Isola’ (as she called herself) gave as her chief characteristics burst on me through the gloom. But nothing except a few flickering lights, which looked like ‘will-o’-the-wisps’ dancing over a pool at midnight, had been made apparent to me. On the evening of which I speak I had not been thinking of, or trying to communicate with ‘Isola.’ Grave business matters had occupied my mind and kept me close writing at my desk till nearly two o’clock. Then I pushed all my papers on one side, and rose to seek my bedchamber. The castle was in darkness, for (according to my usual custom) I had desired my household to put out the lights and retire. I took the lamp in my hand, and commenced to mount the staircase. As I reached the landing it was suddenly extinguished. For this phenomenon I am utterly unable to account. I only know that I was left in complete darkness, and that for the moment, bewildered by the occurrence, I forgot the lamp was shaded by a globe, and believed that the draught from some open window must have blown out the light.

“Still under this impression, I began to

groped my way up the remainder of the staircase. As I reached the corridor my attention was arrested by seeing before me what appeared like a small mass of vapor rising from the ground. The corridor was intensely dark from end to end, and its stained-glass windows were closed with shutters. The ball of vapor seemed to move; it astonished me; I stood and looked at it. Now it advanced, then it receded—now it appeared to elongate, then to sink down. I had never seen anything like it in my life before. Presently I observed one of the ‘will-o’-the-wisps’ that I had learned to call a ‘spirit light’ flickering about in the centre of the vapor. It burst, or seemed to do so, diffusing its brightness over the base of the vaporous matter, which simultaneously elongated and rose higher in the air. A second spirit light made its appearance; the same results ensued; and the vapor became an illuminated column. Then, for the first time, it struck me what it was. A spirit stood before me. Little by little the pale blue cloud assumed the shape of a draped figure, though I could trace no features; little by little the figure became more distinctly formed and visible, until a shadowy arm was extended towards me.

“‘Are you Isola?’ I gasped; for I am not ashamed to own that on the occasion of this first experience I was very much alarmed.

“The figure did not stir.

“‘May I not see your features?’

“Still there was no reply by sound or action.

“‘Can you come nearer to me?’

At this it moved directly, passing right over, or around me, as it were, and enveloping me in a thick fog, through which I rushed shuddering to my own apartment.

“I threw myself on the bed, in what would be called, in common parlance, ‘a mortal fright.’ The effect this first interview with a disembodied spirit had on me was remarkable. I longed, and yet I dreaded, to meet it again. For some weeks I entirely forsook my library except by day, and went regularly to bed before my servants. But at the end of that time I grew ashamed of my pusillanimous fear. Was this to be the end of all my study and research? I recommenced to sit for communications; and then I learned that the spiritual body never appears to mortal eyes

but as a vapor, although practice in mediumistic vision will render form, features, dress and color perfectly distinct; that few spirits can materialize, or clothe their spiritual bodies with a human form palpable to touch, without the aid of a trance medium, and that those who have succeeded in doing so (such ghosts, for instance, as have become celebrated in history) have generally been spirits of the very lowest order, the authors of great crimes whilst on this earth, and consequently disabled (from indulgence of evil passions which prevent them from existing in a purer atmosphere) from rising above it.

“This information gave me a distaste for the cultivation of seeing mediumship, although I was assured that I possessed it in no ordinary degree. But though I never encouraged her, from the evening I met ‘Isola’ on the staircase, she never failed to come to me in palpable shape as soon as the light was extinguished; and it was not long before I had the power to see and recognize all the spirits that filled my room; although with some I never had any acquaintanceship either in this world or beyond it.

“It was at this time my brother Arthur died. His marriage, which had been contracted about three years previously, had annoyed us all. He was a great deal too young and too poor to take the responsibilities of married life upon his shoulders, and his choice had not fallen in a desirable quarter. These circumstances had made a coolness between us, for which I grieved. Arthur was my only near relation; we had loved each other fondly as children, and it was misery to me to be on bad terms with him now. But he was of a high and rather overbearing spirit, and, unable to forgive my first animadversions on his ill-advised conduct, had refused to communicate with me since, and rejected all overtures of peace. When he died, his regiment was at Malta. Just as my father had done, he came to tell me of his departure; but his appearance was the more remarkable from the fact that it took place in the daytime. One afternoon about three o’clock, on entering my library from the garden; what was my surprise and pleasure to see my brother sitting in my armchair. He was dressed in uniform, but I did not notice that peculiarity, so delighted was I to meet him again, and so thoroughly was I

convinced that I saw him in the flesh. " 'Arthur, old fellow!' I exclaimed, rushing towards him with extended hand, 'when did you reach home?' He did not answer, though his eyes gazed at me earnestly. As I drew nearer, a pallor overspread his features, and he sank backwards. I thought he was fainting, and rushed to his assistance.

"He was gone!"

"By this time I was too well acquainted with the phenomena of spiritualism to be either frightened or surprised. I was only *deeply, deeply* grieved. My brother, who had lain in the same cradle, and been nursed at the same breast as myself, had left me before opportunity had been granted us to heal the sad difference that had embittered the latter portion of our lives. Although I had received no earthly intimation of the fact of his decease, I mourned for him as bitterly as though he had passed away whilst in my arms, and retired to my chamber worn out with the violence of my grief. In the midst of that wakeful, restless night his voice came to me, '*My wife and child!—my wife and child!*' The words were repeated twice. He said no more, but they were all-sufficient. Before the letter which announced his premature demise had reached me, one from my pen had crossed the ocean to assure his widow of my sympathy and desire to help her. She came to the castle, bringing her little Arthur with her, and has remained here ever since. Some people wonder (John Bulwer amongst the number) that I evince so much affection for my sister-in-law, but they do not know the circumstances under which my brother died, nor the compact I have made with him since. For some time afterwards I heard nothing from him. And in touching on this subject, I must remark that it is a singular fact that the spirits of the dead seem occasionally to have the power of appearing immediately on their decease (as in the cases of my father and brother), but, generally speaking, not afterwards for some space of time; which period varies with different individuals, and is apparently determined by the state of mind in which they quit this sphere.

"Be that as it may, my brother did not come again to me till a twelvemonth had elapsed from the period of his death. Then he once more manifested himself, and has

communicated with me at intervals ever since.

"Agatha and her boy were by that time established in Castle Valence. When I found that she took an immense interest in all that I said and did, I confided to her the secret of my studies, and found, to my pleasure and amazement, that she not only sympathized with and believed in them, but had herself prosecuted their research in Malta.

"I immediately told her the whole history of my experience, and we resolved to pursue our studies together; since which period, although the influence never leaves me (*I wish it would*), I have seldom sat alone. Agatha is not so powerful a medium as myself; she has never been entranced nor influenced to write, speak or play through spiritual agency, but she takes an extraordinary interest in everything concerning spiritualism, and is always at my beck and call. Together we have plodded through all the old black-letter books that I have been able to procure on the practice of witchcraft and necromancy, and compared them with the more modern writings of Kardec and others, making notes as he went, so that I have folios of proof ready with which to confront those who would confound the science I pursue with the diabolical acts prevalent in the dark ages. But I have not space to-day to notice the nature of the communications I have received, nor the influence they have had on my inner life.

"From the first Agatha took a great interest in the spirit 'Isola,' and 'Isola,' rather to my chagrin, seemed almost to desert me for my sister-in-law. I tried not to be jealous, but I confess it cost me a few pangs. To find that a friend whom you have considered all your own takes a greater interest in the conversation of your neighbor is never flattering; and no one knows, except such as have tried it, how real and substantial are the friendships to be formed with those in the spirit world.

"All the more so because there can be no deception. Soul speaks to soul without the intervention of matter; it is impossible undetected to smile with your lips while you curse in your heart, and therefore all the protestations of affection which you receive, you may rest assured are true. I have always observed one thing about spirits; they have no hesitation in speaking

their mind, whatever it may be, and the fact lends a zest to their communications which is absent from the most confidential friendship that was ever born of earth.

* * * * *

"Agatha has alarmed me. She thinks that Everil is looking ill. Can it be the situation of this old castle that disagrees with her? The moat may make it damp; yet I have lived here all my life, and have felt no ill effects from it, and the house itself is in perfect order.

"Ill! It seems impossible she should be ill; such a bright, strong, energetic girl as she has always been. I questioned her on the subject, and she denied the feeling. She has everything that she requires, she said; and there is nothing that I can either do or get for her.

"But Agatha thinks you are looking quite poorly," I urged.

"Agatha knows nothing about it."

"You have no pain—have you?"

"At this she actually smiled.

"None whatever! Never had any in my life. Don't know what it is! I wish, Valence, you could put such fancies out of your head."

"But if you look so pale, it is natural I should get fanciful."

"Do you really care?" she commenced; and I was about to assure her that I did, when she interrupted me again.

"Look here then, Valence, I will tell you the truth. I am missing my old friends, Alice Mildmay and Miss Strong—I should greatly like to see Miss Strong again."

"Do you wish her to live here?"

"If you have no objection—yes!"

"I sighed inwardly. Here was another barrier to be raised between mutual confidence. As it was, I felt that my wife was drawing further and further away from me each day—I should never be able to over-leap Miss Strong. But I did not let her guess my discomfiture.

"As you will, Everil. You had better write to her on the subject. And ask Miss Mildmay if she will stay with us at the same time."

"She thanked me quietly, and I thought she was pleased; but when I repeated our conversation to Agatha, she laughed at my simplicity.

"Fancy prescribing old Strong and that simpleton Alice Mildmay as a remedy for the blues. You are a queer fellow, Valence."

"But what am I to do then? It was Everil's own suggestion. She said she was missing her old friends."

"Ah! I dare say she is; but she had other old friends besides those two chattering women. Now I'll tell you the truth, Valence. She is fretting after the gayety she has left behind her. Norman House was always full of visitors—lots of young men coming and going—always some fun or flirting on the *tapis*. You have cut her off from all this, remember."

"But she is a married woman now."

"I do not know when I have seen my sister-in-law laugh more heartily than she did at this remark.

"And do you suppose being married changes a woman's ideas, feelings and fancies. O you goose! Everil is moping, you may take my word for it, and what she wants is more company. This is a very dull place, you must admit, Valence."

"You have never seemed to find it so," I answered, with a sigh.

"Ah! but I am so different," said Agatha, and she drew near me with one of those caressing gestures which make all she does appear so soft and womanly. "How could I take any interest in a parcel of strangers, whilst I have my dear Arthur's memory to cherish, and his child to look after and to love? You must make allowance for the difference in our circumstances, dear Valence."

"My brother won a jewel in you, Agatha, and you will find some day that I have not been unmindful of your kindness and attention to myself. But about this company. How am I to set about filling the castle?"

"O, I should not think it would be difficult. Could not Mr. Bulwer be persuaded to come here for a fortnight? And then—let me see—Lady Russell wrote me word yesterday, that her brother, Maurice Staunton, is staying with his cousins the O'Connors, at Ballybroogan. He's a very pleasant fellow!"

"Staunton! is not that the young man I met at Norman House?"

"The same."

"Will he care to come? I thought he had rather a *penchant* for Everil, himself."

"O my dear Valence, what an absurd idea!" cried Agatha, laughing and blushing. "I dare say they had a sly little flirtation together; but if he was much at Norman

House, it was not all for Everil, *I can tell you that.*'

"I looked at her quickly—there was a look in her eyes I had never seen before, and a light seemed to break on me.

"'Agatha! is it possible?'

"'Nothing is impossible, you stupid fellow,' she said, clapping her hand over my mouth; 'but ask Maurice Staunton by all means. He's a great favorite of mine, and his sister, Lady Russell, you know, is one of my oldest friends.'

"And so she went smiling away.

"I wonder if she really does like Staun-

ton, and if it was for her sake he hung about Norman House! I should not be in the least surprised; Agatha is a charming woman, very pretty, and only twenty-six. Nothing could be more natural than that she should marry again.

"Well I must look up this Staunton, and ask him over; and if his company makes Everil look a little brighter, I shall be amply repaid for my trouble, even though he does return my kindness by taking away my sister-in-law."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XX.

"AGATHA! THIS IS SOME OF YOUR DOING!"

A FEW days later Lady Valence is seated in her morning-room, which overlooks the front of the castle, listlessly watching the gardeners, already employed in sweeping the first leaves of autumn off the terraces. She is vexed and disappointed; for her appeal to Miss Strong to come back and resume her office of companion has been met by a sympathetic but decided refusal. Perhaps Miss Strong guesses that she is required more as a confidante for her ladyship's domestic troubles than for any real use she can be in the castle household, and declines to be placed against her inclination in the doubtful position of a go-between. Perhaps she believes that her pupil's married life is likely to prove a battle that is best fought out alone, or that the presence of any one who has been connected with her former existence is more calculated to widen than heal up the breach.

But anyway, whether it arises from a sense of duty or inclination, Miss Strong pleads a half-formed engagement as a reason for refusing Lady Valence's offer; and Everil, who was constantly abusing the old lady when she was compelled to fill the thankless office of her duenna, voting her a "bore," a "spy" and a "telltale," is quite ready at the present moment to rank the fact that she declines to resume her former espionage over a married woman as a fresh misfortune.

Alice Mildmay is coming to stay with her, though. Alice Mildmay has accepted the invitation, extended for an indefinite period, with every appearance of delight, and Everil is looking forward to meeting this friend of her girlhood again. Still, Alice Mildmay is very young (she is just six months Lady Valence's junior), and it is impossible there can be the same confidence between them now as when they were girls together. Everil feels this, and is almost disposed to think that her dear friend's presence will prove a restraint instead of a pleasure. In fact, she is in a

despondent mood this morning, and wants—she can hardly say what.

As she muses and gazes on the scene before her, a saddled horse is led round from the stables, and walked slowly up and down in front of the house. It is a high-bred, high-spirited creature, and as it approaches a garden-roller in the pathway it starts so suddenly as almost to jerk the reins out of the groom's hands, whilst its small ears well laid back, and a suspicious whiteness about the corners of its eyes, cause Everil (who is so used to horses) to observe to herself that it is not only high-spirited, but slightly vicious. She does not know for whom the animal is waiting, nor does she care. She does not remember ever to have seen it before. Perhaps it belongs to some visitor to Lord Valence, or the steward may be about to ride it on business to the nearest town, or the servant who holds it may be only waiting to receive and carry some message or letter that requires despatch. But as the groom turns, she sees him touch his hat and quickly lead the horse up to the castle door. Her curiosity is awakened—she leans forward to the window. What is her surprise at seeing her husband swing himself into the saddle, whilst a second groom, mounted, appears in readiness to attend him. Where can he be going at that hour of the morning, to require the attendance of a servant?

Valence so seldom rides on horseback at all, that the mere circumstance is strange; and (separated as they are by want of confidence) he has not as yet undertaken any step of importance without advising her of it. As he mounts, settles himself in the saddle, and gives some parting direction to the servant, she watches his movements eagerly, and thinks how slight, and fair, and delicate he looks, and how lightly (notwithstanding his serious illness) his thirty years sit on him.

As he turns away from the castle door without turning his head, she sighs; but when, in preparing to cross the draw-bridge, he looks back as though to scan the windows for a watcher, with a sudden

impulse she hides herself behind the curtain, and remains so till he has resumed his former position.

She watches him until he is about to enter the drive. As he does so, his horse, who has trodden the drawbridge planks as though he were dancing, shies at some trifle, and, being recalled to order by his rider, rears violently. Lord Valence does not swerve in his saddle; but Everil remembers the look of the animal at the garden-roller, and a great fear assails her.

Her husband is riding a vicious horse—he will be thrown and mortally injured—perhaps killed. Her eyes are distended with the horror of the idea—her whole frame is trembling with excitement as she quits her morning-room, and rushes into that of her sister-in-law.

"Agatha! what horse is that that Valence is riding? There!" pointing with her finger over the drawbridge. "He has just entered the drive—a bay brute, with black points. Where did he get him?"

"My dear Everil, how can I possibly inform you, unless you will let me see? Why—that must be the horse he bought of Colonel Shorter last spring. I wonder what has made Valence have him up from grass."

"Why was he put to grass? I have never seen him before."

"Very likely not, my dear. I think Valence kept him down at the farm. Well, the reason he was put out to grass was because he broke poor Tim Bray's leg whilst he was grooming him in the stables, and the breaker-in didn't think he was safe to ride."

"I knew it! I felt sure he was a vicious brute whilst the man was leading him up and down. I saw the way he laid back his ears at every little obstacle. How *very wrong* it is of Valence to mount him! He ought to know better. Every good rider knows the pleasure of controlling a high-spirited animal; but none but children or fools care to ride a vicious one!"

"Heyday! what unwonted excitement!" says Agatha, rather sarcastically. "What are you afraid of, my dear? That he will come home with all his precious bones broken, and be obliged to hobble about on crutches for the remainder of his life?"

"Nonsense! It would make little enough difference to me if he did. But I do think Valence might be a little more

considerate of—of— Well, at any rate, you must acknowledge he would give trouble enough to us all if he were to come to grief."

"O, I don't think you need anticipate that, Everil. He has plenty of servants, you know, and he has me; so I do not fancy much of the trouble would fall on your shoulders. But why not confide your fear to him on his return? I am sure Valence would be only too much honored to think you cared whether he was killed or not."

"Perhaps I don't," replied Everil, with a return of the haughty feeling with which she meets every piece of advice of Agatha's on behalf of her husband. "Do you know where he has gone to?"

"To Ballybroogan, I believe, to call on the O'Connors."

Everil starts.

"The O'Connors! But they have not called on me."

"Haven't they?" carelessly. "Valence has known them a long time."

"But why should he go to see them to-day? He said nothing to me about it."

"I really am not the depository of all your husband's secrets, Everil. I suppose he has his reasons."

"The O'Connors! Ballybroogan!" repeats Lady Valence, musingly; then, with a sudden color, "Agatha! is not that the place where Maurice Staunton is staying?"

"I believe it is."

"And does Valence know that he is there?"

"He does. In fact, if you will have the truth, he has gone over expressly to call on him."

"To call on Maurice Staunton?"

"Yes; and to ask him to come and stay at the castle. Now the murder's out."

"Agatha! this is some of your doing."

"My dear child, please don't look as if you were going to scratch my eyes out. I have had nothing to do with the matter. It was Valence's own proposition. He said you told him you were fretting for the society of your old friends, that you wanted to ask Miss Strong and Alice Mildmay to come and visit you here; and when he heard young Staunton was staying at Ballybroogan, he said he should ride over and ask him to make one of the party."

"And why didn't you prevent him? Why didn't you say that you were sure it

would displease me?—you who know so well that I would rather go ten miles the other way than meet Maurice Staunton again."

"My dear Everil, just think what you are proposing. Was I to be the one to open Valence's eyes to all that went on between young Staunton and you before your marriage to himself? Do you think he would have thanked me for the information?"

"Why should he not? What do you mean to insinuate? You know that nothing went on that I am ashamed of, or that I could help."

"In that case, why so strenuously object to meeting Captain Staunton again?"

"Because it will be very painful to me."

"Do you still cherish a little *tendresse* in that quarter then, *ma chere*?"

Everil stamps her foot impatiently.

"Why will you worry me in this manner? You know I do not. I have told you so a thousand times. But—"

"But what, Everil? Considering that Maurice Staunton's family have been friends of mine for years, and that I was the first to introduce him to you, I think I have a right to be told in what manner he has so grossly offended you."

"I have no objection to tell you. I consider that he behaved exceedingly bad to me—in an unmanly, ungentelemanly and dishonorable manner."

Agatha West holds up her hands with surprise.

"My dear Everil, what gross charges! I never heard so sweeping an accusation in my life. Poor Maurice! If you had only seen him as I saw him after that fatal twenty-seventh of May, you would never speak of him as you have done—his misery, his self-reproach, his complete devotion, I shall never forget. He seemed quite broken-hearted."

The Countess of Valence is not entirely unmoved by this declaration. As she hears it her eyes become humid and her lips tremble. It is so difficult to think hardly even of a love which we have proved to be unworthy. But still she braves out her own assertion.

"I don't believe it, Agatha. He put it on, most likely, in order to deceive you. If he had cared for me as he professed to do, why should he have drawn back at the

last moment and left Valence in possession of the field?"

"But you told me you separated by mutual consent."

"I would have said anything at that moment to save my pride. But the real truth is, that as soon as Captain Staunton heard I should lose my money by marrying him, he declined to proceed any further; he even urged me to fulfil my engagement with my cousin. What is the natural deduction of such conduct?"

"He was too noble and unselfish to drag you down to share a life of poverty with him," sighs the widow.

"He was too mercenary and too mean not to care for my fortune better than myself, Agatha. Why cannot you call things by their right names? When I look back at Maurice Staunton's conduct when he first knew me, and compare it with that at the last, I cannot find words sufficiently strong in which to tell you *how much I despise him*."

She delivers this sentence with so much emphasis that Mrs. West is really startled. Is it possible the countess can so entirely have forgotten her former attachment!

"Everil," she exclaims, quite naturally in her surprise, "what on earth has made you change your mind like this? You have learned no more of Staunton than you knew upon your wedding-day."

"Perhaps not; but I have thought a great deal more of him. I have pondered over his words, analyzed his motives, and criticised his actions, till I know him, fancy, a little better than you do. There is nothing kills love so quickly, Agatha, as contempt; and I have so thorough a contempt now for Captain Staunton that I should be glad to think that we should never meet again. I am very sorry I did not know of Valence's mission before he left the castle."

"Would you have told him?" asks Mrs. West, quickly.

"Perhaps I might," is the careless answer.

The widow is puzzled. She cannot believe that feelings so strong as Everil's are eradicated in a day. She thinks the girl must be deceiving herself, and that once more, in the presence of her lover, and hearing his excuses from his own lips, she will learn to regard the past with a more lenient eye.

She changes her cue, and immediately becomes sympathetic and confidential.

"Now look here, darling," she says, sweetly, as she takes Everil's hands and pulls her down upon the sofa beside her. "Why not tell me all about it? You know I never heard the rights and wrongs of the case, and it is very likely that we may be playing at cross purposes. Of course I had my eyes about me last spring, but you spoke so little on the subject, and the *denouement* took me so completely by surprise, that it bewilders me even to think of it. What really passed between you and poor dear Staunton?"

"It is not a pleasant subject to revive," replies the countess, as she bites her lip and looks down; "but, perhaps, as you saw so much, it is as well you should hear all. You know that he made love to me."

"My dear! a blind man might have seen that. Why, the poor fellow was just over head and ears. He adored the ground you trod on."

"So he told me, and the sequel proved how much truth there was in his profession. For three months he was steadily paying attention to me."

"And when did he propose?"

"He never proposed."

"Never proposed! You don't mean to say so!" exclaims the widow, who has known perfectly well from the beginning that nothing definite on the question of marriage had ever passed between them.

"Of course he never proposed. Had he done so he would have been obliged to stick to it," cries Lady Valence, impatiently. "Captain Staunton is scarcely the kind of gentleman who would care to be brought to book by my two guardians."

"But, my dear girl—excuse me for interrupting you, but this subject is of so much importance to myself—if poor Maurice never offered marriage to you, wherein is he so greatly to blame for having withdrawn his attentions in favor of a more powerful suitor? Come, Everil, try and be just."

"He led me to believe he would propose. He knew—he must have known—that I regarded him favorably. It was a bitter injustice to me."

"It would have been a much more bitter injustice had he persisted in claiming your hand when he knew he had nothing to support you on. I often think," con-

tinued the widow, with a pursed-up mouth and a look of the deepest humility, "when I am called upon to judge other people, of the title of Charles Reade's novel, 'Put Yourself in His Place.' It makes one view things so differently. Now, for instance, dear Everil, just try and put yourself in poor Staunton's place. He loved you devotedly—his worst enemy would not deny him that virtue—and his love for you made him, after a while, conquer his scruples (which I know were most conscientious) to addressing one so infinitely above himself in point of position; hoping, I suppose, that mutual love would smooth away all obstacles. I saw which way the land lay, and tried to put him on his guard—but love, you know, is proverbially blind. Then, all of a sudden, this shock comes on him. If he marries you, you not only fail to fulfil your dead father's wishes, but you lose all your money. He drags you down to poverty and a sense of disobedience. In such a case, what could an honorable man do but draw back? He had not yet committed you or himself. One of you must be the sacrifice. He chose to accept it. He laid down all his hopes (and you must allow, Everil, they were not insignificant ones) on the altar of duty, and left you free to do as your friends desired and expected of you. What more could the poor fellow have done? To my mind, he acted in the most honorable and generous manner it was possible to act in. And yet you blame him. You call him all manner of hard names, and say you wish never to see him again. Poor Maurice! it would have been better indeed for himself had he been as mean, and grasping, and selfish as you would make him out to be."

The countess has been listening to this harangue in utter silence. Her sense and judgment condemn it, but she has no argument ready wherewith to confute its sophistry. She only feels that under the same circumstances she would have acted differently, though she can hardly decide in what way. But a certain undefined consciousness that, notwithstanding the pain of her wounded vanity, all has been for the best, and that she would not have the past altered if she could, tend to make her less eager to deny the truth of Mrs. West's assertion than she might otherwise have been.

"I see you are beginning to agree with

me, darling," continues Agatha, insinuatingly, as she glances at the expressive face of her companion.

"It may be as you say, Agatha. I am not prepared to dispute your opinion. At the same time I hold to my own. I have no wish to see Captain Staunton again, and if what you say is true, he ought not to wish it either."

"Ah! it would be a sad comfort, doubtless, but still I think it would comfort him, dear. He has fretted himself ill, you see (Lady Russell was sadly afraid some such consequence might follow his disappointment), and I believe his best remedy would be to see you well and happy; to be sure that his noble unselfish conduct had earned its reward, and that you were not fretting like himself. You would not like poor Staunton to think you were as miserable as he is—would you? or that you felt the past too keenly to permit of your meeting him again?"

"Certainly not!" exclaims Lady Valence, decidedly.

"Well, then, why not let things take their course? Let the poor boy come here and see for himself that he has not had the power to make your life unhappy. Besides, Everil, Valence is rather peculiar in some of his notions, and you could hardly prevent his asking Staunton here without giving him a reason. And how would it sound, my dear? That because the man had withdrawn his attentions in favor of your husband, you refused to meet him even as a friend. What would any one think from such a confession?"

"O, I don't care if he comes or doesn't come," says Everil, rising abruptly, as though wearied of the discussion. "If Valence asks him here, and he has the bad taste to accept the invitation, I suppose I must receive him as I would any other gentleman. But I'll tell you one thing, Agatha—and since you are so much Maurice Staunton's friend, perhaps you'll be good enough to give him a hint on the subject—if he ever *dares* to allude to the past before me, I'll tell my husband of him then and there. I don't care for Valence, as you are well aware; but I know how to uphold the dignity of my family name." And as she says this, she draws her figure up to its full height, and looks every inch a countess.

"My dear girl!" replies the little widow,

in a deprecating voice, "as if he *would*! How little you know him! I am sure you will find his behaviour all that is most gentlemanly and reticent."

"Let us hope so, indeed. It will be the worse for him if it is not. And now, Agatha, I am going out for a drive, so we shall not meet again till luncheon."

"May I not go with you, dear?"

"Not to-day, please. I have a great deal to think over and decide upon, and would rather be by myself." And without waiting for an objection, she quits the apartment.

* * * * *

It is the afternoon of the same day. Six o'clock has struck, and Lord Valence has not yet returned from Ballybroogan. The countess is in her own room. She has locked the door so that no one may intrude upon her, and is restlessly moving about from one table to another, unable to settle herself to occupation of any kind. There is a new feeling knocking at her heart, so new a feeling that she is unwilling to admit its presence even to herself, and is more than fearful lest others should observe it. She is actually uneasy about her husband. Ballybroogan is only ten miles away, and even if he stayed to luncheon with the O'Connors, there is no reason he should not have reached home long ago. Agatha has not improved her spirits by observing that the Misses O'Connor are three remarkably pretty Irish girls, and that "poor dear Valence" used to be so very intimate at the house a year ago, that many people thought he was going to marry one of the sisters.

Everil has just found out that she hates Irish girls, or rather (being half Irish herself) all such as are thoroughbred, and thinks it very bad taste on the part of Mrs. O'Connor to try and detain Valence at Ballybroogan, after the scandal that has been spread concerning her girls and him. And to make him so late in returning home, too! Why, it is getting quite dusk, and—O that horse! Suppose he should really have started in good time, and some accident has occurred to detain him! Why, with such a horrid vicious brute as that, he might be thrown anywhere between this and Ballybroogan, and be dead before the groom could procure assistance.

That was the sort of thing that came from living in an out-of-the-way place like

Ireland, where the roads were as rough and lonely as it was possible for them to be. And then the Irish tenants with their dreadful blunderbusses, lurking behind hedges to shoot their landlords! How often had she heard such stories in England that had made her blood run cold. And what was to prevent such a disaster happening to Valence now, or if not now, to-morrow, or any day?

Between her anxiety and her desire to lay the blame of it on anything but her own heart, Everil is becoming incoherent and nonsensical. She paces around the room like an unfamed animal; she locks and unlocks her door twenty times, and at last, unable to bear solitude and suspense any longer, runs down to the hall with some vague notion of looking for Lord Valence's approach from the open door. But as her foot touches the last step of the long wide staircase, a clatter of hoofs sounds on the outside gravel, the portals of Castle Valence are thrown open, and she perceives a group of horsemen on the terrace beyond. She would like to draw back then and hide herself anywhere; she wishes she had not been so foolish as to leave her room—but it is too late. To turn and reascend the staircase, when strangers are about to enter her house, would be as rude as undignified; and there are no rooms in which she can take shelter without crossing the vast hall, in the centre of which she stands. So she remains there, nervous and agitated, but to all appearance perfectly calm. Lord Valence enters, followed by two other gentlemen. At first he does not see his wife, and is about to lead the way to the library.

"Valence!" she exclaims, and, do what she will, it is impossible quite to prevent her voice bearing traces of her recent emotion. "What on earth makes you so late?"

"You here, Everil! Am I late? What makes you think so? We started as soon after luncheon as we conveniently could."

"Lady Valence's anxiety is so *very* natural," says a voice she knows but too well. Since her conversation with Agatha, Everil has made up her mind that she will be obliged, at some time or other, to bear the penalty of Maurice Staunton's company, but she hardly thought that it would be so soon. The surprise leaves her dumb.

"Ah! here is an old acquaintance of yours, Everil," says her husband, recalled to a sense of his forgetfulness by the remark; "Captain Staunton. I think you hardly expected to meet him again at Castle Valence, but I found he was staying with my friends at Ballybroogan, and have persuaded him to give us a few days here. Let me introduce Mr. Mark O'Connor to you. He and I have had many a pleasant week together in the olden times, but this is his first experience of the castle as a domestic residence."

Mr. O'Connor bows and expresses his polite conviction that the castle must be twice as delightful now as it ever was before; and Lady Valence is very much relieved to find that his introduction has followed so closely upon the mention of his companion that there is no necessity for her to do more than bow to either of them in return. And then her eyes wander back to rest upon her husband, and she repeats, more to cover her confusion than anything else, "You are very late, Valence. I thought something must have happened."

"Why, did you think I was killed?" he says, jestingly.

He pauses for an answer, but none comes. He looks into her face, and her lip is trembling. He places his hand on hers and pats it—not unkindly, but not earnestly—and continues, still in jest, "No such good luck, my dear."

Lady Valence turns from them suddenly, and reascends the staircase. At the first landing-stage she stops, and says, very deliberately, "Dinner is at seven, and it only wants twenty minutes to the time. Will you show your friends to their rooms, Valence?" and turns her back on them again.

As she enters her own room large tears have gathered in her eyes and are rolling down her cheeks. What would Agatha West have thought could she have seen her now?

CHAPTER XXI.

"COULD YOU LOVE SO?"

A WEEK after the advent of Mr. O'Connor and Maurice Staunton the breakfast-table at Castle Valence is hardly recognizable. Since their return from the continent Lord and Lady Valence and Mrs. West have been used to sit down to this meal in solemn state together, and often

in utter silence, engendered by the wife's indifference or the husband's dreamy habits. Now, all is changed. The party has been reinforced by Alice Mildmay and John Bulwer (who appears more than pleased to renew his acquaintance with the pretty English bridesmaid who did duty with him at the late wedding). The host and hostess are obliged to be punctual in order to meet the requirements of their guests, and the old dining-hall, wainscoted and-raftered with bright dark oak, rings with the clatter of knives and forks, and the cheerful music of youthful tongues. Lord Valence, under the invigorating influence of company and the cheering society of his friend John Bulwer, is quite lively (once or twice he has even been betrayed into a peal of laughter); and Mrs. West, though satisfied that her scheme for introducing Captain Staunton to Castle Valence has succeeded, may often be seen watching her brother-in-law's movements with a long earnest gaze, as though she were trying to discover what new idea has had the power to displace, even for a moment, the ingrained conviction of a lifetime. Everil is, perhaps, the one least affected (or apparently so) by the innovation. She has not experienced the difficulty she anticipated in meeting and treating Maurice Staunton as an ordinary friend. His deferential and almost distant manner has from the commencement much aided the line of conduct she considers due to her own dignity; and after the first few trying hours, when recollection of the past almost overwhelmed her with shame and indignation, she has found the task much easier.

But she has not yet acquired the art of appearing quite self-possessed in his presence. Her natural feelings of uneasiness and distrust would make her boisterously gay whilst under his scrutiny; but she has checked the inclination, fearing it might be misconstrued, and schooled herself to be formal, and distant, and coldly polite instead. Lord Valence notices her want of gayety, and sighs to think that he has made her lot so dismal that even the society of her old and favorite friends has not the power to dissipate her habitual gloominess. Agatha sees it, and fancying it is but a mask to cover the true state of her feelings, congratulates her wicked little heart on having accomplished so many

more steps towards the achievement of a victory. Valence puzzles her, but of Everil she believes it only requires time to make her certain; and she excuses the continuance of Staunton's company by keeping up the idea in her brother-in-law's mind that it is for *her* sake he is so flattered by an extension of his first invitation; and this notion Valence has communicated to his wife.

On the morning after Staunton's arrival he remonstrated with her on the evident coldness of her reception. "You might have welcomed him a little more cordially, Everil."

"But I don't like him. I am very sorry you asked him to the castle. I had no wish to see him here."

"Are you in earnest? I thought he was a friend of yours."

"A friend of Agatha's, if you like. He is no friend of mine."

"Ah! I guessed as much. Well, then, for Agatha's sake, try and be more cordial. You made the poor fellow look dreadfully uncomfortable last night."

"It won't hurt him if I did."

"But it may hurt her. And, putting all other considerations on one side, do you think it advisable, Everil, to place any obstacles in the way of Agatha's settling again? Her living here is all very well at present, but"—with a sigh—"by-and-by, my dear, you may desire to have the house to yourself, and—"

"I wish to heaven you wouldn't talk of such things, Valence," she interrupted, passionately, with a stamp of her foot.

"Let me then say plainly, that for both our sakes I think it may be as well that my sister-in-law should marry again."

"And do you suppose Captain Staunton wants to marry her?" exclaimed Everil, in surprise.

"She has hinted as much to me. Mind, only hinted. Doubtless he has said nothing definite; but if she liked him it would be a very suitable match."

His wife burst out laughing.

"O, that's her little game, is it? Well, then, Valence, I promise you I will treat Captain Staunton more civilly. But it is for *her* sake, mind; not my own. I tell you frankly I don't like him."

"Except that he has always proved himself a gentleman, I do not suppose you have any reason to be particularly friendly

with him for your own sake. Though I used to think, Everil, that he was rather 'taken' with you, till Agatha undeceived me."

"O, Agatha undeceived you, did she?" repeated Lady Valence, mechanically.

"Yes, long ago, at Norman House, though I did not suspect she liked him on her own account till the other day. He is really a very nice fellow. I can't think why you should have taken such a prejudice against him."

"It is of little consequence. My likes and dislikes are like myself, unaccountable and erratic. Let us drop the subject."

And thenceforth, although she does not believe one word of Mrs. West's insinuation to her brother respecting Maurice Staunton and herself, Lady Valence becomes less haughty and more studiously polite to him than she has been before. Firstly, because she does not wish her manner to attract her husband's notice, and draw down his censure again; and secondly, because she fears lest the extreme of indifference may lead Agatha and Staunton to imagine she requires it as a panoply wherewith to shield herself from the attacks of the latter. When Alice Mildmay arrives her task becomes easier. She keeps much with her when they are all assembled together, and manages to join pretty indiscriminately in the general conversation.

On the morning in question, the gentlemen are all bound for the shooting covers, and the ladies have been wondering what they shall do to amuse themselves all day.

"I can always amuse myself with reading," says Alice Mildmay.

"I dare say you can, my dear, if you have anything to read," retorts the countess; "but this is the most dreadful place for books you were ever in in your life. Not a circulating library within fifty miles of us."

"But you have a monthly box from Mudie's."

"Which invariably contains all the books you don't want to see and none of those you do. Last month's cargo consisted of five works on science; three vapid novels, and half a dozen volumes of poetry. There wasn't a readable line amongst the lot."

"I'm sure you can't have read all the books in Lord Valence's library yet, Everil," exclaims Alice. "I peeped in at the door yesterday, and I was quite awed

by the appearance of the room. It looked so dark, and mysterious, and full of learning. Do you often sit there?"

"I never sit there," replies her friend, pointedly; "that is Lord Valence's private apartment, and he allows no intruders."

"O, I'm so sorry. I'll never look in it again," giggles Alice.

"I'm sure if you would like to do so, Miss Mildmay," stammers Lord Valence, "at any time of the day, that is to say, I should be most happy to show it to you."

"I won't go without Everil; I should be afraid," she answers.

"And I don't care to go," returns the countess, quietly. "It is not a favorite room of mine; I have no wish to enter it."

Lord Valence looks at her for a moment, earnestly, then sighs, and turns to Bulwer.

"If you are at a loss for some light reading, Lady Valence," says Captain Staunton across the table, "I should have the greatest pleasure in lending you one or two French novels. I have some excellent ones in my portmanteau, that have only just appeared in Paris. I brought them over on purpose for you to see."

"You are very good," she replies, haughtily. The idea of accepting a favor from him, however small, is unendurable to her.

"May I fetch them for you after breakfast?"

"I dare say Miss Mildmay would be pleased to read them. Do you like French novels, Alice?"

"If they're easy ones, dear; but it's an awful bore to find a lot of idioms jumbled together at the most interesting part of the story."

"It will do you good to be puzzled," laughs Lady Valence. "You were always a lazy puss at lessons. Have you finished, Agatha? If so, let us go into the garden."

They take a few turns on the terrace; pay a visit to the stables (for, with all the trouble lying at her heart, Everil has not done violence to her nature by giving up her devotion to her four-footed friends), caress and admire the pack of dogs that follow at their mistress's heels, play a little with Master Arthur, and return to the castle to find the gentlemen departed, and the day before them all their own.

"Shall we ride? shall we drive? Shall we play? shall we sing?" exclaims Lady Valence, as they enter her morning-room.

"O, let us spend this morning in the house," says Alice. "See!" pointing to some yellow-covered *feuilletons* lying on the table, "these must be the novels Captain Staunton promised to lend us. How delightful it would be, darling, if Mrs. West and I got our work and you read aloud to us."

"I am quite willing to do so if it pleases you," replies Everil, cheerfully; and seating herself on a sofa, she commences to read one of those realistic and exciting stories which the French novelists of the present day so much delight in, and which claims the attention of both reader and listeners until the gong sounds for luncheon.

"I don't know when I've enjoyed anything so much," exclaims Alice Mildmay, as Everil rises and puts down the book; "I had no idea it was so late. How tiresome it is to have to leave off just at the moment *St. George* meets *Catherine* again! Isn't it a charming story, Everil? Isn't it just like life?"

The countess does not answer. Mrs. West glances up at her. She is standing by the table, with her eyes cast down and one hand upon the book, thinking. The incidents of the tale have revived the saddest portion of her life. She is comparing her own fate with that of the heroine, married to a husband to whom she is indifferent, and whilst her heart is still bleeding from the wound inflicted by another hand. How will it fare with *Catherine* and *St. George* when they meet again? How will they act towards and speak to one another? This is how Agatha West interprets the thoughtful look on Everil's face.

"Shall we go and have our luncheon, and come back and finish the story afterwards, Everil?" she asks.

Lady Valence starts, colors violently, and abruptly leaves the table.

"Yes, yes, of course, unless you would rather go for a drive. Come, Alice; come, Agatha! I have read so long I feel quite dizzy. I think it would be better to go into the open air before we commence our studies again."

And taking Miss Mildmay's hand, she dances down the staircase and through the hall, as though she were a very child.

But before the evening closes in the reading is resumed, and the end of the story

is so affecting that Everil can scarcely steady her voice sufficiently to make the last few pathetic words audible.

* * * * *

"What an interesting novel that was you lent Lady Valence yesterday," says Mrs. West to Captain Staunton, as she looks up sideways to him from beneath the shade of her parasol.

They are walking on the terrace together.

"Did she read it?" he asks, eagerly.

"Every line, from the first word to the last, and was so deeply moved she could hardly command her voice. Have you brought many more with you, written in the same strain?"

He meets her glance, and smiles intelligently.

"You think they will be useful?"

"O, I say nothing. Some women's imaginations are very hard to move, and others take their hue from what they gaze upon. French romances are not considered wholesome reading, as a rule. But the countess is not a child."

"If I send her some others, will you persuade her to read them?"

"I should do that for my own sake. I am as fond of stories as a child. And Everil is an excellent linguist. Send her some more by all means. But"—in a lower voice—"be careful, and don't startle her too soon."

* * * * *

The merits of the French novel are discussed openly at the breakfast-table, and Alice Mildmay cannot say too much in its praise.

"It is a most interesting and delightful story. *St. George* is such a darling, and *Catherine* the most charming heroine I ever read of. Am I not right, Everil? Did we not enjoy Captain Staunton's novel? Was it not difficult to tear ourselves away for a walk in the wood?"

"It was certainly very absorbing. Most French romances are."

"Have you had time yet to look at the other one—'*Madame St. Clair*'?" demands Maurice Staunton, of no one in particular.

"No," replies Alice (for Everil never addresses him unless she is obliged to do so); "but perhaps we may this morning, if Lady Valence pleases, that is to say," she adds, cautiously.

"I hope you will read it. You will like

it so much better than 'Catherine,'" he says, turning to his hostess.

"We are engaged out to luncheon to-day," she answers, coldly, and then, as though the sound of her own voice had reproached her, she adds in a kinder tone, "We shall hear it in good time, I dare say, but novel reading is rather too engrossing a pursuit to be indulged in continuously. What would your dear father say to it, Alice?"

"He would call it 'mental dram-drinking;' but we can't all be parsons, Everil. Do you remember how papa used to lecture you about the mad way you rode and drove about the country? Do you remember the race you rode with Charlie Rushton, and how astonished the old laborer was when you cleared his wheelbarrow of rubbish in the road?"

"Yes, I remember," says the countess, quietly.

"What a mad thing you were in those days, Everil. What have you done with it all? Papa wouldn't have much need to lecture you now, would he?"

"His office would be a sinecure, Alice."

She smiles sadly as she says this, and, raising her eyes, encounters those of her husband, fixed upon her. Her lids droop, and a deep blush rises to her cheeks.

"Lady Valence has taken the onerous duties of matrimony upon herself," remarks Captain Staunton. "Perhaps when you have done so, Miss Mildmay, we may see an alteration in you also."

"I don't see why one need lose one's spirits," replies Alice, briskly.

"And I don't see in what I have lost mine," says the countess, in much the same tone. "I don't go tearing all over the country with my hair half way down my back. That may be because I have too much respect for myself and my position; but I am just as fond of riding as ever. By the way, I should like a ride this morning. Will you order my horse, Valence, for eleven o'clock? I shall enjoy a canter over to Bracken Woods."

"I thought you were going out to luncheon, my dear?"

"I shall be back before it is time to start. Will you come with me, Alice? You shall have my little chestnut filly. She's as quiet as a lamb."

"If you will guarantee she won't kick me off—yes. But I know your 'quiet

lamb' of old, Everil. It was your lamb of a 'Black Prince,' remember, that ran away with me at home last year, and nearly dashed out my brains against a tree."

"You don't mean to say so!" exclaims John Bulwer, with evident concern.

"Ah, indeed, Mr. Bulwer; and had he not thrown me into the hedge instead, you would have never had the pleasure of making my acquaintance. Only fancy that! But Everil declared it was all my fault, and that the dear creature was as quiet as a lamb."

"He always was with me," replies the countess, laughing. "But the chestnut filly is a real angel. Ask Agatha, who is the greatest coward on horseback possible. Even she has ridden her."

"May I be permitted to form part of your escort?" demands Maurice Staunton, presently.

"No!" she says, sharply—"at least I mean, no, thank you, Captain Staunton. I cannot bear to ride in a crowd."

"Then I am afraid it will be useless putting in my petition," says John Bulwer.

Alice looks disappointed, Everil puzzled; but she cannot possibly grant to the one what she has just refused to the other. So she repeats much the same words, but in so subdued a manner that all present note the difference.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Bulwer, but I have just said 'No' to Captain Staunton, you see. I dislike a large riding-party. It destroys all chance of conversation."

"Let us both go then," pleads Bulwer, "and we can ride two and two."

But at this prospect, knowing which cavalier would fall to her lot, Lady Valence makes a decided objection, and Alice Mildmay and she start unattended, excepting by the groom. Seeing that her companion is rather downcast, Everil addresses her thus:

"I dare say you were surprised at my refusing Mr. Bulwer's escort this morning, Alice; but the fact is, I want to speak to you alone."

"Yes, dear."

"And about the very gentleman in question."

Alice grows scarlet.

"You must have noticed his manner toward you, Alice. And since, while you stay at Castle Valence, you are under my care, I feel myself responsible for what

happens to you. Mr. Bulwer is falling in love, if he is not already; and if it goes on, it will end in a proposal. Are you prepared for that?"

"O Everil, it sounds so funny to hear you talk like an old woman!"

"Does it? But that is no answer to my question. John Bulwer is an old friend of my husband's, and Lord Valence would feel very much hurt at any ill-fortune that happened to him. If, in the event of his proposing to you, you intend to accept him, of course it's all right; but if you do not like him well enough to do so, I think his visit to the castle should not be prolonged. Do you understand me?"

"What can I say, Everil?"

"Tell me the truth. You know it is safe with me. Do you like him?"

"I think he is a very agreeable fellow," returns Alice, simpering.

"O Alice, for heaven's sake, don't look so like a schoolgirl. Would you marry him if he asked you?"

"But will he ask me, do you think?"

"Certainly, if this goes on much longer. He is a thorough gentleman. What shall you say when he does?"

"I think—I think, Everil—yes, I am almost sure I should say Yes; that is, if papa approves, you know."

"You *think*—you are *almost sure*—if your papa approves—O Alice, what weak, wavering idiots we women are! I don't believe there's any real love left in the world. We take whatever comes in our way, and if it doesn't suit us, we either cling to it weakly and are miserable, or we cast it from us bravely and are wicked."

"O Everil!" exclaims Alice, with the open-mouthed horror of the simple at the very name of sin.

"No real strong passionate love," continues the countess, hurriedly, "that clings to its object, good, bad, or indifferent, through thick and thin—that winds all the tendrils of its life about it, and to whom separation means death."

"But so few people die of love now-a-days, dear."

"I don't mean mortal death—I mean the death of passion, of energy, of hope and faith, and all that goes to make a man or woman. True love is self-abnegation, and when the creature we love fails, what is to prevent our falling also?"

"But that would be wicked, wouldn't it, Everil?"

"Perhaps it would. Perhaps men like your father might say the very love I speak of would be sin; but, at the same time, it would be beautiful. It would be so devoted that it would secure the happiness of the thing it loved even at the risk of crushing its own feelings to the earth; and it would be so strong that, maimed and helpless, it would still live, drawing its life from the joy it could not share."

"Everil, could you love so?"

"I do not know. I have never tried," she answers, shortly.

Could you love so? The question returns to her again and again. Not Maurice Staunton. Recent as the time may appear when this man seemed all in all to her, Lady Valence knows that it is past, never to return. Her lot in life may be uninteresting, uncertain, unsatisfying, but she would not exchange it even now for that which it was so painful to relinquish. Did she ever love Staunton? Was the feeling which she bore him worthy of the name? She told Alice Mildmay what is her firm belief, that real love will cling to its object, good, bad, or indifferent, through thick and thin. Has her love so clung to him? or, rather, has not the perception of his selfish, shallow nature and mercenary motives shivered the fragile material into dust?

Could she love so? Could she love to the death? She asks the question, and there is no answer, only her breast is thrilled with a long deep sigh, and her heart sinks depressed with a sense of loneliness. What folly it is to think of such things! Her fate is settled. She has nothing more to do with love or happiness.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WILL SHE MARRY HIM?

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT, AUTHOR OF "AN UNFORTUNATE MATCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXII.

"OPEN SESAME."

THE flirtation between Bulwer and Alice progresses satisfactorily, and the *denouement* is expected daily. Little Arthur has sickened with the measles, which keeps his mother in attendance on him in the nursery; and Mr. O'Connor has returned to Ballybroogan. But Captain Staunton still lingers on at Castle Valence, and Everil is thrown so much in his company, that she has begun to regard their constant meetings almost with indifference.

"I don't care for that story," she says one day as she returns a novel to him.

"What fault do you find with it, Lady Valence?"

"It is immoral—grossly so. The woman had married with her eyes open. What right had she afterwards to quarrel with her condition?"

"The right of love. Has love no rights? You used to say it was all-powerful."

She has no answer ready. She turns away without speaking.

"I have another novel I am very anxious you should read. Here it is," continues Maurice Staunton, offering the book to her.

"I don't wish to read any more, thank you. I am rather tired of them."

"Only this one. It treats of a subject which I know will deeply interest you. By the way, how is Lord Valence's health?"

"Lord Valence's health?" She starts, for a moment really not comprehending the allusion.

"Yes; it was so indifferent, you may remember, at the time you married. Is it improved?"

"Greatly improved." She says the words steadily, though she knows they are not true. "Cannot you see it for yourself?"

"I confess I have not observed much difference; and, from Mrs. West's account, I was led to fear that I was correct."

"O, what *did* she say?" cries the countess, eagerly.

"Only the old story. But you should know best, of course. What a relief the

improvement in his lordship's condition must be to you!"

She does not note his sarcasm. All she aims at is to deaden, by the sophistry of an unconscious love, the pang he has raised in her heart.

"He is not really ill. I assure you he is not. Agatha always tries to make him out worse than he is, and I think she encourages him in the belief. But he eats and drinks well, as any one can see. And he takes plenty of exercise; and—and—"

"Don't let me distress you. I am so sorry I spoke," says Maurice Staunton, coldly. His voice recalls her to herself. She remembers to *whom* she is speaking, and, with a sudden look of pride, she takes the book which he has placed beneath her hand, and withdraws from his presence.

Lady Valence has a headache that evening—an unaccountable headache, that has sprung no one knows whence, and renders her incapable of appearing at dinner. Every one who has a right to do so appears in turn to demand the reason of her defection; but she only confesses herself languid and heavy, and disinclined to move; says jestingly she thinks she is sickening for the measles, and sends them away as perplexed as when they came. Agatha is angry, declares it is all nonsense, and she could appear at the dinner-table perfectly well if she chose. Alice hangs about her for a few minutes with a red face, and suggests that "Mr. Bulwer will be so disappointed" if she doesn't join them in the evening. Only Lord Valence, after the first brief inquiry, does not express an opinion either way, except to beg that she will please herself. So she pleases herself by sitting in her dressing-room, loosely attired, perusing the novel which Staunton has lent her, and which (notwithstanding her asseverations to the contrary) proved so interesting, from the few glances she cast between its pages, that she is fain to read it through. At first the story simply attracts her attention; next, she is struck with its wonderful similarity to her own case; then her eyes become riveted on the pages, and her mind absorbed with curiosity to learn the end of

the narrative. It is the history of a man and a woman (what history is there one could write, to prove interesting, that did not contain a man and a woman to poison or bless the existence of each other?) thrown together, as she was thrown with Maurice Staunton, ignorant that any obstacle existed to their becoming lovers. They are at the height and fervor of their feeling—they have grown so necessary to each other's happiness that nothing but death seems capable of parting them, when they receive the shock of the knowledge that the woman's father is a bankrupt, and must sell his daughter to the highest bidder. The man is poor, the lovers are torn asunder, and the woman is married to a wealthy old and feeble suitor. The lover whispers courage to her. "Be strong, my friend—be patient. This cannot last forever. The time must come when our affection will be rewarded—when you shall again be free." But the prophecy is not fulfilled. His new condition agrees with the old man; he revives again, becomes rejuvenated, and threatens to maintain his rights for an unlimited number of years.

The lovers, after the French fashion, continue to hold secret assignations with one another; but this is not sufficient for their happiness—they want to enjoy the old husband's wealth publicly and together. At last one day, when they have been discussing their mutual misfortunes, the man insinuates how easy it is to make Fate succumb to our inclinations. He argues the point sophistically and well, and he ends by drawing a small vial from his pocket. "How strange," he continues, "it is to think, my friend, that a few drops of this harmless-looking liquid, placed in his drink or food, should have the power to take away the life of a man with such subtlety, as to render detection next to impossible. What wonderful discoveries this age has brought us!"

He says no more, but he leaves the vial behind him on the table. When night comes, and the wretched woman is querulously demanded by her old husband to rise and get him something to drink, the temptation comes to her to empty the contents of the vial into his glass. She does so hastily, allowing herself no time to think, and with a trembling hand carries the fatal draught into his bedchamber. She approaches the bedside—withdraws the cur-

tain—gives one look at the old man's face—a scream—and the glass falls from her hand, and is dashed to atoms on the floor. Her husband has died in her absence; it is a corpse that lies before her!

The would-be murderess is free, and the romance ends with the clash of wedding-bells and the reward of virtue.

* * * * *

Everil has finished the recital. The book has fallen from her hand—it lies upon the ground at her feet. The evening has faded into night; but she has read it with locked doors, and no one has gained admittance to her solitude. Agatha and Alice have passed by on their way to bed, and whispered their good wishes and good-nights through the keyhole. She has heard the gentlemen go noisily up stairs; her maid has knocked, and been summarily dismissed. She has had no wish for any companion but her own thoughts.

This tale—this terrible tale—how it has affected her! How her cheeks have burned with shame as she divined the miserable heroine's motives, and followed her career! How her heart has beat with eagerness to learn whether her good angel would triumph over her bad angel, or what would be the punishment to follow her guilty love! And then, the end—the sickening end—when she went to her lover's arms with hands which, but for the interposition of Providence, might have been red with her husband's blood! As Everil ponders on the plot of the tale she has just read—on its false sentiment, its loose morality, and unevenhanded justice, she feels she has lowered herself by perusing it. What right, she asks angrily, had Maurice Staunton to place such a book within her hands?

But here an awful sense of sickness overpowers her, as she recalls the conversation that took place between them on the day they parted, and remembers how she then permitted him to comment on her future husband's slender chance of life, without rebuke! What was it that he said on that occasion? *That he should wait.* For what? For Valence's death?

Ah!—

As the thought strikes her, the cry that accompanies it would have been heard in an ordinary-sized house from basement to attic. But Castle Valence is built after so rambling and solid a fashion, that a woman's voice had need be loud to penetrate its

walls even from one room to another. But with that cry all Everil's look of thought and contemplation has vanished. Her face becomes pained and restless—she leaves her chair; and paces up and down her room like a caged animal.

For Valence's death! Every other consideration—every other feeling is for the moment swallowed up in that!

Valence's death!—Valence gone!—Valence hidden away in the silent grave—and she, left here *alone* without him—without her love! her darling!—her dear, dear husband!

The truth is out at last! Everil is looking on her own heart, bared and defenceless, and can see the treasures scattered there.

* * * * *

It will be remembered that, in the old story, familiar to all of us, of the "Forty Thieves," when Ali Baba goes up to the rock, and pronounces the magic words of "*Open sesame*," the door flies open. "Ali Baba expected to find only a dark and gloomy cave, and was much astonished at seeing a large, spacious, well-lighted room. He observed in it numerous bales of rich merchandise, a store of silk stuffs and brocade, rich and valuable carpets, and, besides all this, large quantities of money, both silver and gold. At the sight of all these things it seemed to him that this cave must have been used not only for years, but for centuries."

This is a picture of her feelings. At that cry of horror at the prospect of the death she thought she could contemplate with equanimity, the door of her heart flies open, and instead of the dark, desponding receptacle she supposed it to be, she sees a warm, loving, womanly spirit, filled with the treasures of faith, and hope, and charity—treasures which, to judge from their accumulation, must have lain there for some time—and only longing to fly to its kindred soul to gain the rest it sighs for. That book, placed in her hand with no such noble purpose, has proved the "*Open Sesame*" to her heart.

Everil loves her husband!

As the astonishing truth, overwhelming from its suddenness, dawns on her mind, how much she hates the thought of Maurice Staunton!

He gave her that tale to read, knowing the moral it contained, believing it would interest and please her! What did he

mean? What could he have intended to insinuate? Does he think she has fallen so low as to be able to live with Valence as his daily companion and his wife, and still wish to compass his death? *Still!* could she ever have harbored so base a thought? She covers her face with both her hands at the idea. O! she is unworthy of him—unworthy of all his confidence and care. She will go at once—this very minute—and fall at his feet, and tell him everything—*everything!* This night shall not pass without a full confession. And then, when Valence knows all her weakness and her sin, and sees how penitent she is, perhaps he will take her in her arms, and let her love him for the little—sobbingly—the little time that is left!

* * * * *

With Everil all is impulse. She must have what she requires at the moment, or she no longer cares for it. From her childhood she has been indulged in this foible, until it has grown into a habit with her; the spoilt and petted heiress has never known what it is to wait; and now that her heart is clamoring for relief she gratifies its instinct.

She therefore leaves her room, careless where the pursuit of her strong desires may lead her, and walks almost blindly into the next, which is her bedchamber. But it is deserted and still. Valence has evidently not yet sought its solitude. She glances at her watch—all in the same eager, hurried way; it points to a quarter past one! Her husband must be in the library. Everil has never approached that door after dark since the night she was repulsed from its threshold by the behaviour of her husband and his sister-in-law; but she does not heed that circumstance. Had the thought that Agatha might be there even now flashed across her mind, it would not have the power to stay her footsteps. A mighty determination to tell Valence *all*—to let him know the worst—has seized her; and she would make the atonement in the presence of twenty witnesses if it were impossible to gain him alone.

She passes out into the corridor, which feels chill and lonely—wraps a shawl, which she has hurriedly thrown on, more closely round her shoulders, and makes her way towards her husband's private apartment. The door is locked as usual. She rattles fiercely at the handle. He calls out

from within, as though starting from a reverie, "Who is there?"

"It is I, Valence! It is Everil. Do let me in."

"*You!*" he exclaims, as she hears the voice come nearer. "Why, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No! no! but I must come in. I want to speak to you. Valence! pray open the door!"

"I would rather not. You have heard me say that before. Go to bed, my dear! It will not be long before I go myself."

"But, Valence! O! for God's sake, listen to me! I have something to say. I cannot rest until I have seen and spoken to you!"

"Something to say?" and as he echoes her words he unlocks the door and stands before her. "What can you have to say that will not wait until to-morrow?"

"It has waited too long—too long already," she answers, as she throws herself into his arms. "O Valence! my Valence! I love you!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I WILL TELL YOU ALL."

To say that the earl is astonished is to say little. A dozen conflicting emotions pass rapidly over his countenance as he closes his arms about the form of his wife, and holds her firmly to him. His fair face flushes and turns pale; his delicate features work with agitation; his limbs tremble as though he had the ague; yet all is silence between them. Everil is sobbing violently, and in the darkness (for the library is unlighted, except for the moonbeams straying through the painted windows), they stand together, united at last, though scarcely able to comprehend the blessedness of being so.

"Let me light the lamp, dearest," whispers Valence, as soon as he can command his voice to speak.

"No! no! let us remain in the dark. I have so much to tell you, so much to confess. Let me say it as I stand here in the dark."

"There is no need to stand," he answers gently, as he draws her towards a sofa, and places himself by her side. She feels his breath drawing nearer to her face. She knows he is about to seal his pardon beforehand on her lips, and, shrinking from the

contact, slides downward until she rests upon the floor at his feet.

"Why, Everil, what is this?"

"My proper place, Valence, and I will not quit it till you have heard everything. O, you do not know how vile—how wicked I have been!"

Had the room been lighted then, she would have seen his face grow anxious and more sad.

"This is a grave accusation, Everil! I think you must be exaggerating matters."

"Indeed, indeed, I am not; but I will tell you all. I came here for no other purpose."

"Kiss me first, dearest! Tell me that you love me, again, first!"

She cannot resist the pleading tone. She throws her arms about his neck, and half smothers him in her impetuous embrace as she keeps on exclaiming, "I love you! I love you!"

"I could not help it," she says, half apologetically, when it is over, "and it may be for the last time, Valence! When you married me you thought that I was at least free to accept your affection. I was not."

"Poor darling!" he says, compassionately, as he strokes her hair. "I almost feared so. How I must have made you suffer!"

"I was not free to marry any honorable man, because I had given my heart away to a worthless fortune-hunter, not worthy the name of gentleman, who cared nothing for me in return."

"The scoundrel!" cries Lord Valence, starting. "Only tell me his name, Everil, and you shall be avenged as thoroughly as your heart could desire."

She lays her hand upon his arm. A sudden thought has struck her. Would it be honorable of her, in her turn, to give up to no purpose the name of the man who is at that moment staying in the castle as their mutual guest? What good could she do by it? In what way remedy the evil of the past?

"What signifies his name?" she answers. "I have done with him and with his name forever. The confession I come to make to you to-night concerns myself alone. I married you, Valence, with less than love. I almost hated you."

"I guessed it, Everil," he says mournfully.

"At first I thought no power on earth

could make me marry you; but this man—this wretch—who pretended that he cared for me, but who was too poor to marry me without a fortune, insinuated—O Valence, how can I tell you?—He insinuated—he pointed out to me—that—that—”

“My darling! I can guess it for myself. He pointed out to you that my life wasn’t worth a brass farthing; and that, once a widow, your hand would be again at your own disposal.”

“And—and—that he could wait until that time came,” says Everil, sobbing. “And I—I was base enough to listen to him, and to believe it; and to feel glad, if I must marry you, that it would be for so short a time! And now—now—O Valence! put me from you—send me away. I have been as bad as a murderess, that slays her own flesh and blood. O my God! my God!”

Her grief is so violent that she has flung herself prostrate on the ground. The earl rises, gropes about for a means of lighting the lamp, and then, retracing his footsteps, raises his wife tenderly from the floor.

“Don’t—don’t! I am not worthy!” she exclaims.

“Not worthy! Are you so anxious to get rid of me still, then, Everil?”

At that thought she bursts into a shrill scream, and flings herself hysterically upon him.

“To get rid of you? O, that I could die ten thousand deaths for yours! But it is not true, Valence!—tell me it is not true! You are well—you can eat, you can drink—you can go about like other men. Tell me—for heaven’s sake tell me this has been all a horrid dream, and you will live to let me love you, and make amends for the bitter past!”

“My darling! you have made me wish to-night for the first time that I *could* say no.”

She stares at him with silent horror.

“To hear you speak to me as you have spoken this evening, Everil, has been the great wish of my heart ever since I knew you. I loved you from the first, though it was long before I would acknowledge it to myself; and to feel that you return my love at last, is greater happiness than I ever hoped for. It makes all the rest easy—even”—he adds in a lower key—“death?”

“Valence, you must not speak so. O my husband! how could you die with my warm heart beating against yours? Agatha says

so. Agatha always drives me mad with her insinuations about your falling health; but I cannot believe it—I will not believe it! It is not true.”

“It is true. Everil, my darling, you must learn to believe it.”

She commences to weep afresh, hanging about him. “How can you know it?” she says, passionately.

He places her on the sofa, and throwing one arm around her, draws down her head to rest upon his shoulder.

“You love me,” he says, tenderly, “and you have a courageous heart. Shall I make a clean breast to you, Everil, as you have done to me? Have you the strength to hear *everything*?”

“About yourself?”

“About the mystery that envelops me—that is attached to this dark room, where you so often find me sitting by myself—about the source from which I draw my internal conviction, that not only is my early death a certainty, but that even the day and the hour are already fixed.”

“I have courage to hear anything you wish to tell me,” she answers, shuddering as she hides her face in his breast.

“You have been brought up, perhaps, to laugh at the idea of the appearance of spirits or apparitions as something deserving of the profoundest contempt and ridicule.”

“Valence, there are no such things, surely! I have always regarded the tales concerning them as old wives’ fables.”

“Just so; and therefore it is that, for fear of being regarded by you as a lunatic or a visionary, I have hitherto carefully avoided the subject. But, Everil, it is not a fable—it is a truth that spirits can revisit this earth, and make their appearance palpable to more mortal senses than one.”

She does not answer him. The old fear that he is mad is stealing over her again; yet it does not make her shrink. She only creeps closer to his side, and turns her face inwards, so that her lips lay against his heart.

“Go on,” she whispers, faintly.

“From quite a boy I have been a student of the occult sciences that treat of the subject, and from being myself what is called a ‘medium,’ or ‘seer,’ I have enjoyed unusual advantages in its pursuit. It is the spirits who have told me, Everil, that I shall not live.”

"The spirits! But how can spirits speak to you, Valence?"

"By many ways, dearest, but chiefly in the way you are speaking now."

"Do you mean to say that they have voices?"

"Voices, and bodies, and minds. Sometimes they are impalpable to touch, at others they are as material as ourselves."

"Valence, you must be dreaming!—or are you saying this to try how far my credulity can go?"

"Do you think me likely to jest on such a matter, Everil? You don't know the wild longing—the fierce burning pain that has seized on me from time to time since our marriage, because I knew it all to be so true. And now—at the very moment when I hear your sweet lips confess you love me—O how I long to stay with you now!"

"You *shall* stay—you are going to stay. O my Valence! this indeed is mere fancy. You have studied so hard that it has affected your judgment. Who ever heard of such a thing before? Indeed, indeed, you must be mistaken."

"You think me mad, in fact," he answers, bitterly.

"No, love!—no, darling!—don't say that! But the wisest of men have sometimes had to acknowledge themselves in error; and I think—this story is so wild—so improbable. Why not ask the advice of some older, more practical thinker than yourself?"

"Why not set myself up as a laughing-stock for the world?—who, when the prophecy is fulfilled, would say I had worried myself into my grave. No, Everil. I will die as I have lived—alone—except now for your sweet companionship and sympathy."

"I shall talk to you night and day, until I have talked you out of your belief in apparitions. I cannot understand it. I thought all such superstition had been swept from the earth long ago."

"Everil, if you saw those apparitions with your own eyes would you believe in them?"

"Perhaps so—if I saw them—which I never shall."

"Would you have the courage to remain with me and watch?"

"I would have the courage to remain anywhere with you, Valence."

"I will put it to the test. I would have saved you this; but I cannot bear that you should think me such a slave to superstition. Everil, if you will stay here with me

to-night, you shall see the spirit who has forewarned me of my death."

"Are you sure?" she says, incredulously.

"I am almost sure. She has seldom disappointed me. Still there is just the chance that your presence may disturb the influence. Will you risk it?"

"Anything, so that you do not send me from you."

"Only promise me one thing—that when the spirit appears you will neither scream nor attempt to grasp it, nor even to move from the seat where I have placed you. The most disastrous consequences might follow your want of faith. Will you promise me?"

"I promise. Henceforth I am yours only, to command as you will."

They extinguish the lamp after that, and lock the door, and sit together on the sofa, murmuring the fondest protestations of attachment into each other's ears. The beauty, the holiness of first love is upon them both, increased by the knowledge that what has become their highest pleasure is their duty. Everil pours forth her confidences in one continuous stream; her distrust of Agatha—her fears for himself—all the doubts she had before her marriage, all the jealousy she has experienced since, she tells to Valence as frankly as is natural to her. Whilst he, between many a fond endearment and expression of gratitude, gives her a more detailed account of his past and present experiences, explaining the mystery of the trances into which she has seen him fall; of the scrawled handwriting she found upon his desk, and the lengthened vigils he has been in the habit of observing.

They talk as rapidly as the ideas come into their heads; everything that has been so long pent up in their hearts wells forth at once; and in an hour's time they know more of each other's minds than they have ever learned before. Once or twice they pass a brief term of silence, when their love seems to have reached its climax, and nothing more is needed to express their feelings. These intervals, notwithstanding the prospect before him, are almost happiness to Valence; but Everil, though deeply grateful for the explanation with her husband, is disturbed and anxious. Can it really be true that he believes in the appearance of ghosts?—and if so, is it consistent to credit him with being in his right senses? And yet how calm and collected he appears.

Everil has heard of people's brains being diseased on one point only, and wonders, with a shudder, whether it can be his case; but she presses all the closer to him for the thought, resolving that, come what may, her life shall be devoted to him to the end.

"Valence," she says, presently, in an unusually tender voice, "you have not forgiven me yet."

"Forgiven you! What for, my darling?"

"For the dreadful thoughts I harbored against you before our marriage. If I could only tell you how bitterly they have been repented of since!"

"My love, you did not love me then. Love has no claims against you. But if it will make you happier to hear me say so, I forgive you for them a thousand times over. They were all wiped off with the first kiss you gave me of your own accord. But listen! What sound was that?"

"I heard no sound."

"Hush!—wait one moment. I think that she is coming."

He sits upright on the sofa, and by the light of the moonbeams Everil can trace his figure bent forward in the attitude of listening, and his earnest preoccupied air.

"My darling, it is nothing," she says.

"Will you promise me to remain here," he says, hastily, "without moving or making a sound?"

"I have already promised you."

"Even should I speak to her or touch her, you will not attempt to do either?"

"I promise you," she repeats, mournfully, looking upon the precaution as but another proof of her husband's terrible weakness.

He rises suddenly, pushing the sofa back into the shadow. Then he takes her in his arms, and embraces her fondly. "O my love! my darling! if it could but be averted for *your sake!* Do not mind what I may say or do. Remember! I shall return to you."

He stands by her side for a moment, and straining her eyes through the darkness, Everil presently perceives the faint glimmer of a light. It flickers first against the stained glass of the window opposite to them; then passes to a second one at the further end of the room.

"It is she," says Valence, with suppressed excitement.

She would beg him to be calm, but is fearful of giving him offence. The light

stays at the further window, then brightens gradually, and Everil's intense curiosity (now thoroughly aroused) never permits her afterwards quite to satisfy herself how it passed through the window, and appeared in the room.

But there it is, far from them, yet distinct, widening in degree, with every moment, until it reveals a mass of white—a face—a woman's bust and shoulders—diaphanous drapery—and a veil of flowing golden hair!

"*Isola!*" cries Valence, starting forward.

The apparition raises its arm; he stops half way between it and Everil.

"What have you come for—to repeat again the lesson I have learned so well?"

The figure bows its head.

"Tell it me then. I have courage now to bear everything. *How long have I to live?*"

The apparition speaks, slowly, and in a whisper.

"Four months—November, December, January, February. On the 28th of February, at noon, I come to you. Beware! prepare!"

"God in heaven! can it be true? Four months only, and when life has but just opened upon me! Isola, listen to me! I have but just learned what happiness is. My wife loves me!"

The spirit does not answer.

"Will not love bind us to the earth? Can it be possible for the spirit to leave the flesh whilst it is full of energy and sweet ripe hopes and human affection? May you not have made a mistake?"

"On the 28th of February, at noon."

"Isola! I never longed so much to live as now. My earthly hopes are so transcendent, so absorbing. Is there no respite—no delay?"

"On the 28th of February, at noon, I come to you. Beware! prepare!"

He hides his face for a minute in his hands. When he lifts it again the apparition has disappeared.

Valence gropes his way to the sofa.

"My sweet brave girl! how calmly you have behaved through it all. We cannot avert destiny, my Everil; but we will at least meet it in each other's arms."

He essays to raise her as he speaks, but her form is heavy and motionless. Alarmed, he rekindles the lamp. His wife is not so brave as he imagined. She has fainted!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"SAY THAT YOU WILL SAVE HIM!"

DR. NEWALL, now an old man, almost past the allotted span of life, is acknowledged on all sides, and invariably spoken of as the "castle physician." Not that Lord Valence holds so much by the customs of past ages (when noble families invariably maintained a chaplain and a doctor among their retinue) as to pretend to keep Dr. Newall to himself; but the old man attended the deathbeds of both his mother and his father, and, having always proved a faithful and trustworthy friend, the late earl bequeathed him an annuity on condition that he remained near the castle during the lifetime of his sons. So that virtually his services belong to the family. Valence would give Dr. Newall house-room in the castle, did he not prefer to occupy a little cottage on the estate, where he lives in quiet content, doctoring the bodies of the poor of the village, while his brother, the priest, who resides with him, looks after their souls.

Everil knows both these gentlemen by sight. One of the first things that Valence did, after his return from abroad, was to bring his old friends to introduce to his wife, and she received them with all the courtesy due to their position. But she has thought little of them since. Dr. Newall, she is aware, pays a periodical visit to the castle, and she has sometimes met him walking in the grounds; but she has never engaged in any private conversation with him, far less approached the subject of her husband's health. But as she wakes on the morning following her vigil in the library—wakes to such a mingled amount of joy and sorrow as she never felt in her life before—the first thought that flashes across her mind is to ask Dr. Newall's advice. He brought Valence into the world, and has attended him through all the ailments of infancy and youth. Surely he must know more about his constitution and mental organization than any one else. Agatha has often told her that Dr. Newall has confessed himself puzzled by Valence's complaint; that he has said that his mind was working on his body to such an extent that if some efficient remedy were not soon discovered he must succumb to its influence. But if Agatha knows this dread

secret, which Valence has disclosed to her, why has she not communicated it to Dr. Newall, and thrown some light on what now appears a mystery to him. Everil has always distrusted Agatha. She distrusts her still more as this idea occurs to her. How false must be her pretence of concern for her brother-in-law's health when she can neglect to make use of such a weapon as this may prove in the physician's hands. She thinks of all this as she is dressing; but she says nothing to her husband.

He rises from his couch, joyous as a bridegroom, the sad eyes that have so often haunted and reproached her in her dreams, brimming over with his new-found happiness. He has been so long used to the idea of death, that the mere reiteration of a prophecy he has schooled himself to accept as true is powerless to disturb his present peace; and Everil has not the heart to communicate the cloud that hangs over her own mind to his by referring to it. So they laugh and love, and are to all appearance blissfully content through the morning hours, and descend to breakfast (but for that sword of Damocles suspended over their heads) as happy in their mutual affection as ever were Eve and Adam when first presented to each other.

"O, if it might but last!"

Everil finds herself repeating this ejaculation over and over again. Heaven's doors are opened; she stands upon the threshold of all bliss, only to know they have already commenced to swing slowly but surely to again. Yet even this thought cannot prevent an unusual look of excitement pervading her countenance as she enters the breakfast-room leaning on her husband's arm, the first time she has ever done so.

She is not restless; but she is wildly happy, and the knowledge of her pain and of her joy makes her do strange and fitful things. She laughs loudly without reason; talks fast; helps herself to half a dozen different dishes, eating really of none; and asks the same question several times over. Valence, on the contrary, is rather silent; but there is an expression on his face which is very foreign to it—the look of happiness. Mrs. West glances from the wife to the husband, and the husband to the wife, and is anything but satisfied with the scrutiny. At first she makes no comment on the alteration in their behaviour, except such as is conveyed to Mau-

rice Staunton by an elevation of her eyebrows; but after a while her patience is exhausted, and, considering her position in the castle, the widow forgets herself.

"What on earth is the matter?" she says, snappishly. "I declare, you are getting quite hoydenish again, Everil. It is not generally considered dignified for a married woman to come scuttling down stairs like a schoolgirl."

"Indeed! not when she is dreadfully late, and in a state of mental terror lest her guests should have eaten up everything worth eating before she makes her appearance?" replies the countess, feigning indifference.

"You seem 'dreadfully' hungry into the bargain."

Everil glances at her wasted food with amusement.

"Well! and why should I not be? How is Arthur this morning?"

But at this juncture Lord Valence, who has been carrying a dish assiduously round the table (the castle people make a custom of waiting on themselves at breakfast) reaches Everil's chair, and places one hand upon her shoulder. The start—the flush—the sudden look of happiness, tell Mrs. West too plainly (if she requires telling) what the matter is. Everil does not know that she is observed. Lovers are far too much like the ostrich, who sticks his head into the sand, and forgets that his pursuers will trace him by his tail. She turns her face towards her husband and their eyes meet.

Neither she nor Valence, were they married for a hundred years, would dream of making love in public. Love is with them too sacred to be made the sport of general comment. But though the tongue may utter commonplaces, it is not so easy to curb the language of the eyes. Agatha West sees the look which they exchange, and from being anxious and uneasy, becomes bitter.

"Miss Mildmay is waiting for some omelet," she remarks, in an unpleasant voice; "and I should like some too, Valence—when you have time to attend to us. I thought you always professed to have such a contempt for public displays, Everil."

The countess blushes. But she is not the woman to be attacked with impunity. She draws herself up at once.

"So I have — of uncalled-for interference."

Mrs. West giggles uneasily.

"Well! I call that rather hard on poor me. What harm was there in my remark? I shall be afraid to open my mouth next."

Everil does not answer. She is beginning to distrust and dislike this woman more and more every day. She treats her question with silent contempt, and addresses herself to her husband.

"What are you going to do this morning, Valence?"

"I had engaged to drive Staunton over to Ballybroogan, to say good-by to the O'Connors. I am afraid we must lose Captain Staunton, Everil. He cannot get any more leave after Monday."

"Indeed!"

How glad she is to hear that he is going! — that she shall lose even the remembrance of the time of folly during which she thought she loved him! and how she wishes they would all go—Alice, and Agatha, and all, and leave her all alone with *him*.

"But I hope not for long," says Maurice Staunton. "I have some leave due again at Christmas, and Lord Valence has most kindly asked me to spend it here."

"O, that *will* be charming!" cries Agatha, with an apparently irrepressible burst of delight. And then she remembers herself, and titters, and blushes, and glances round the table from under her long eyelashes, and says, timidly:

"I didn't *quite* mean that; but *you* will like to see Captain Staunton again—wont you, Everil? It makes the castle so much more lively to have a few friends staying in it."

"Of course she will like it," replies Valence, good-humoredly (he is disposed to be in a good humor with all the world this morning). "I shouldn't have asked Staunton to come again if I hadn't known it would be agreeable to her. So no apologies, Agatha," laughingly, "and no more blushes. I have no doubt Staunton will take your natural expression of pleasure at the news of his return for as great a compliment as, under similar circumstances, I should have done myself. Wont you, Staunton?"

"I can never feel sufficiently grateful for the kind interest Mrs. West takes in me, nor for the friendship she accords me," replies Maurice Staunton, looking at

Everil the while. "And my best thanks are due to you and Lady Valence for the prospect your invitation affords me of meeting you all here again."

"All right, old fellow! Don't say anything more about it; but come and go as you like, and as you may have the opportunity. The doors of Castle Valence will always be open to you—remember that."

Everil will not join in her husband's invitation. She longs to say that she disapproves of it; that she will not have this man, who has dared to insult her by his base insinuations, and whom she loathes as though he were a reptile, within the walls of any house that owns her as mistress. But she knows that such an outburst would seriously offend and vex her husband, and for his sake she is silent. He thinks that Maurice Staunton comes here for the sake of Agatha. Agatha herself has told him so—and perhaps Agatha may be right. Men's minds sometimes change so quickly, that Staunton may have already transferred his allegiance to her sister-in-law. And, in that case, they will get rid of both of them. Blessed thought! So Everil resolves to wait, and bear, and be silent for a little longer. But this resolution cannot make her cordial to either of the culprits. Forbearance even is unnatural to her: cordiality would make her false. So she treats them both with coolness during the rest of breakfast-time; and rises to leave the room, without, as usual, communicating her plans for the morning.

"Are you going to drive this morning, dear?" asks Mrs. West, who, with the announcement of her friend Captain Staunton's speedy return, appears to have regained her good-humor.

"No!" says the countess, shortly.

"I thought we were going to shop at C—," interposes Alice Mildmay, naming the nearest town.

"Did I say so, Alice? Well, if you'll excuse me, I'd rather put it off. I do not feel inclined for a day's shopping."

"What should you like to do best?" demands her husband, tenderly.

"I should like to have this morning to myself, Valence," she answers.

Neither addresses the other by a term of endearment, yet there is a tone in their voices that seems to say more than any words could do. As Mrs. West hears it

she glances again at Maurice Staunton, and as the earl, and countess, and Alice disappear, she draws him within the shelter of one of the deep bay windows.

"What do you make of that?" he says inquiringly.

"It is some absurd romance they have got into their heads, but it will not last," she answers. "You are sure to be back at Christmas?"

"Sure as anything can be in this world. But what is the reason of her behaviour towards me? Is it real or feigned?"

"Feigned, of course! Do you suppose women are like yourselves, and able to love and unlove at will? But Everil is fighting with her conscience, and cannot quite make up her mind about it. It is early days as yet. I think perhaps your present departure is about the best thing that could happen."

"How?"

"It will give her time for reflection. Besides, she will miss you, and women always get tender in absence. But don't stay away too long."

"You seem to have overcome some of the scruples you favored me with when this marriage was first decided on."

"Ah, my dear boy! it's no use fighting against fate. Not that I would have Everil do anything wrong, for worlds. But if she is to marry again—and of course she will marry again—why not you as well as any one else? I am sure you would do your best to make the poor child happy."

"You seem very certain still that she will be in a position to marry again."

"O, there is no doubt of it! She does not see the change—she has been too little accustomed to think of him or his well-doing; but there has been a great change for the worse in Valence since his marriage. I was speaking to Dr. Newall about it only last week."

"Well, I confess, with every desire to the contrary, that I can't see it. The man seems well enough to me. A trifle thin, perhaps, and rather hectic in appearance, but otherwise not worse than dozens of my acquaintance."

"Ah! you look at the body, whilst the disease all lies in the mind. His trances, or fits, or whatever you like to call them, have been much prolonged of late. The other night I almost thought he never would have come to himself again. Dr.

Newall thinks now the heart is affected as well as the head. But come and take a turn in the grounds, and I will tell you more about it. I hate talking in the house—one is apt to be overheard." And so the worthy pair saunter off together.

* * * * *

It is about twelve o'clock when Dr. Newall's factotum rushes into the back garden to inform him that Lady Valence is in the cottage, waiting to speak to him. The announcement takes the good old doctor quite by surprise. He is very busy hoeing up some potatoes to send to a poor family in distress, and not at all what he considers in a fit condition to hold an interview with the wife of his patron. Besides, the countess and he are almost strangers; he has never thought of her except as a very magnificent, highly-bred young lady, and he is not at all sure of what she will think of a breach of etiquette. So he comes into the cottage parlor with rather muddy boots and disorderly apparel, and full of apologies.

"I really must beg your ladyship's pardon for appearing before you in such a costume, but rather than keep your ladyship waiting, I have ventured to attend your summons just as it found me."

"O, it is so good of you to come at all," replies her ladyship, in a trembling voice.

She has only a garden-hat upon her head and a warm shawl thrown hastily about her shoulders, and she seems agitated and uneasy, and her eyes are red. Dr. Newall rubs his own and looks at her again. Can this be the Countess of Valence, across whose face he has never yet seen any feeling pass except one of proud indifference? He guesses directly that something must be the matter.

"I trust nothing is wrong?" he says, anxiously. "Is there anything in which I can help your ladyship?"

Her only answer is a burst of tears.

"O yes! indeed you can—I hope you can!" she says, between her sobs. "O Dr. Newall, my husband! my husband!"

Dr. Newall, guessing what is to come, turns round, and walking to the door, deliberately locks it; next, opening a small cheffonier, procures thence a glass of wine, and makes Everil drink it. Then drawing a chair close to hers, he sits down and takes her hand between his own as though he had known her all his life.

The touch of nature has broken down all barriers of etiquette between them.

"Now, my dear child," he says, "tell me all. Remember I have known him from his birth. You need have no scruples in letting me know the truth."

"I never knew it till last night," she answers, with a moan, "and I feel I must tell it to some one who is wiser than myself. And I thought that you, who have known him all along, and are such a friend of his, must be better able to counsel me than anybody else."

"My dear (I trust your ladyship will forgive the familiarity)—"

"O, call me anything you like," she says, clinging to the hand which she believes can preserve Valence to her.

"But are you speaking of your husband's health?"

"Yes!—no!—not exactly. I must begin from the beginning—from before our marriage. Valence told me then that he had been given over—that he could not live more than six months or so, and—and—I don't know if I believed him or not—I—" in a falling voice—"I did not care then—it was all the same to me if he lived or—O heaven! if he died! But when we went abroad, and I found he had those dreadful fainting fits, I got frightened."

"Does he often have them?"

"He had four or five attacks during our wedding tour; and Mrs. West says he has had some very alarming ones of late, that lasted for more than an hour at a time."

"Why has Mrs. West never mentioned the subject to me, I wonder?" remarks the doctor.

"She tells me you know all about them, and say they are incurable, and connected with his heart," replies Everil, with surprise.

"My dear lady, this is the first news I have ever had that Lord Valence was subject to anything of the kind. I have often suspected it. I have often seen him of a morning languid, pulseless, heavy, and with all the appearance of a man who has had such an attack as you describe; but I have never been able to make him confess to it. What can be the reason of such reticence?"

"I think I can tell you! When we returned to the castle I found that he and Agatha used to sit up very late together, long after the servants had all gone to bed,

and they would not tell me what for. Once I went down to the library, where they were sitting together, long after midnight, and I found them in the dark, and Valence would not let me cross the threshold. That made me very angry, and for some time afterwards I felt too proud to ask any more questions. Only my husband often alluded to the near approach of his death, and the time when it should have happened."

"Well, my dear—well!" interposes the doctor, anxiously, seeing she falters in her narrative.

"But last night, after I had gone to bed, I was very unhappy, and I wanted to tell him something. He had not come up stairs, so I rose and went down to the library, where I found him, as usual, in the dark. I implored him to tell me the truth—and he told it me. He said," continues Everil, looking up in her companion's face the while to mark what effect her strange communication will have upon him, "that he had seen *spirits*, and talked to them all his life, and that it is a spirit that has told him he must die so soon."

Dr. Newall looks very grave, but he does not evince any surprise.

"I could not believe it," she goes on, passionately. "I have heard of ghosts and banshees, and such things, of course, but I always thought such stories nonsense, and only credited by ignorant people who

knew no better. But Valence asked me to watch with him and prove what he said was true; and I did—and I saw it with my own eyes—and—and—"

"Did you hear it speak?"

"Yes—I think so, but I hardly remember. Valence says I fainted. I know I was frightened and miserable enough for anything. But this is what I came to say. O Dr. Newhall, do you think it is true—that he really will leave me? O, say that you *will* cure him—that you *will* save him from himself—or I shall go mad!"

She has slid from her chair and thrown herself on her knees at the old man's feet; she has seized his wrinkled hand, fresh from the toils of gardening, and is kissing and clinging to it as though he had been her guardian angel, and had all good things within his gift.

"My dear, dear lady!" he says, as he tries to raise her.

"No! I will not get up until you have promised me to save him. O Dr. Newall, I could lay down my life to purchase his! Surely it is impossible that he can die!"

"If you will be good and reasonable, we will discuss the point together," he answers, quietly. Then she rises, ashamed of her sudden outburst of feeling, and sits down, cold and despondent, in a chair.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A WOMAN'S STORY.

BY CORA CHESTER.

"Who would not, in Life's dreary waste,
Snatch, when he could, with eager haste,
An interval of joy?"

I WAS born in poverty. I do not mean the respectable poverty that closes up its brick house and lives in the rear during the warm months, turns old dresses and wears dyed silks, but grinding miserable want.

I had not, like most heroines, "known better days." My mother, a hard-working seamstress, had died at my birth, and my father—well, I do not like to recall my early life spent with him. Even now, as I sit here in the bloom of a late autumn, the old memories of stinging blows and senseless rages bring the indignant blood to my face. I was not as patient with him as I should have been, I suppose. I might, perhaps, have made home a dearer spot to us both; but I was a bitter headstrong girl then, with no sweet past to dream over and make me better, and no bright future to encourage and sustain.

All was blackness, whether I looked backward or forward, and I had not yet learned to look upward. Yet surely a dark back room of a tenement house, fireless and cheerless, could not lure a man from the warmth and hilarity of a corner grogshop.

One night I fell asleep, in the chill of a frosty winter evening, and seemed to see father threatened with some terrible peril. I awoke, all of a shiver, and seizing my ragged shawl and hood from their nail, ran out into the snowy street to the corner store.

His face was not in its customary place behind the cracked tobacco-stained stove, and to my inquiries the men only returned careless replies.

"He had gone with Jim Blake, nigh on to an hour ago, towards the dock. Them two didn't pal together for nothink." There was an ugly job on hand, my informant, a man half stupid over his cups, felt sure.

I was used to the streets and darkness, and it didn't take me long to get to the dock. Jim Blake, of all the bad men father knew, and their number was legion, was

the worst. I felt my suspicions of coming evil grow into certainties as I stood beneath the black clouds and felt the first snowflakes, the forerunner of a storm, against my face.

I thought I saw something moving near a woodpile, and I crouched in the shadow of a building, to watch further developments. I was not mistaken. The figure, that of a man, left its resting-place, and paced back and forth, directly in front of me.

I held my breath as he carelessly struck a match and let the light fall in my dark corner. I shrank further back, and drew a breath of relief as he lazily lighted a cigar. The blaze of the match revealed the face of a man, evidently in the higher walks of life, a strong handsome face, with a wearied expression upon his highbred features, and a cynical curve of the thin lips, half hidden by a tawny mustache. The eyes dark and fierce, but capable of unutterable tenderness—this I learned later—redeemed the almost effeminate delicacy of his face.

All this I noticed in that brief instant, and then he passed aimlessly on towards the river. Presently I heard voices so close to me that I shivered with fear of detection, and clung to the damp walls of an old building for protection.

"Aint ye ready to strike?"

"Hush—soft! he may be armed. These darned bloated aristocrats always carries a settler about 'em. Best to let it go. Maybe he haint got the swag about him."

"Maybe he haint. Where's your eyes? Look at that ere sparkler on his bosom—a clear thousand, to say nothink of the ticker and wallet. Take my word for it, he's a rum one as gets his living out of innocent men like me and you. Here he comes again. Be ready to bag the game. Steady—"

A sudden giddiness came over me with the words. I strove to scream, but my tongue seemed glued to the roof of my mouth. I heard a struggle, a stifled shriek, then, with one desperate effort, I flung myself forward between the deadly assassin and his victim.

A muttered imprecation from behind, then some one had hold of me, and I felt cold steel against my bosom.

"It's a woman. D—n me! I can't."

"D—ye for your chicken heart. I've finished my fine gentleman. Choke the gal, or we'll have the perlice on us."

A hairy face pressed close to mine, searching it in the darkness. I felt a dreadful sensation of strangling, then a wall broke the silence.

"My God, Jim, it's my own gal!"

A tall stalwart figure arose suddenly as if from the dead at Jim Blake's side. One blow of a heavy walking-stick felled the villain to the earth, and then I saw the muzzle of a bright weapon pointed at my father's head. Again did I throw myself in front of the stranger.

"Don't do it, sir. He's my father. I saved your life—spare his!"

"Poor child! then I will not give him the punishment he so richly deserves. He can go in peace. As for you, call upon me at any time, and I will help you. Try to lead a better life, give up the streets, and seek honest employment."

I tried to stutter out that I was honest, if poor, but he was gone. I knew what he had taken me for, and the indignant blood made my face fiery red in the frosty air.

Mechanically I placed the card he had handed me in my pocket, and then roused father from his half-maudlin paroxysm of terror.

"He wont peach on us, father, he said so. Come home, or we'll have the police on us. Come, it is bitter cold."

"We can't leave Jim. Give us a lift, my gal, and take him home."

I felt as if I was staining my hands with blood, but I stifled my feelings, and helped father drag the heavy form through the dark streets, to the cellar where he lived with his drunken wife.

Then I led father quickly past the tempting baize doors of the grogshop, and half pushed him up the broken stairs to our poor rooms.

There was a blank in my life after that. In spite of tears and entreaties, father still haunted the corner store, and day after day passed away when I heard only the weary click, click of the sewing-machine, and father's moans and snores as he slept his drunken sleep in the corner.

One starry June night there came a

change. I only remember the sudden ghastly sight of disfigured still-loved features, as I fell fainting upon my parent's mangled body. The event was chronicled in the daily papers as "Another Row in the Sixth Ward—Fatal Results to one of the Combatants."

I only knew that it left me orphaned and lonely, with nothing to work or live for. In spite of the past, he was my father, the only tie that bound me to the vast earth. He had been my constant care and charge, and without him I daily lost my interest in life.

I awoke one burning July morning, to find a kind Irish neighbor watching over me, who gave me the startling assurance that "it was nigh onto a month since I'd knowed anybody, and I was weak as a baby, and just as silly; and I must lay still and quiet, or the docther wouldn't answer for it."

The doctor, a kind-hearted man, came daily to see me, but shook his head as I turned from the food offered me with all an invalid's disgust of greasy broth and weak tea.

"It wont do. There is no desire for life here. The girl will die; she needs change of scene and food. Have you no friends, little girl?"

His kind manner and the question were too much for me in my weak condition. I tried to speak, but the effort ended in a storm of tears.

The doctor went to the window and blew his nose with great vigor, started for the door, and left without another word.

The next day my few clothes were packed by his direction, in a small trunk, and I was half-carried down stairs and placed in his buggy. What a drive that was, out of slums and alleys into leafy boulevards and broad avenues, until we reached the fairy region of the Park! There we stopped before a large stone house, and the doctor was met upon the threshold of the dwelling by a motherly-looking old lady in black alpaca.

"You see, Mrs. Hall, I have brought my protege, as I threatened."

"That's right, doctor. I have plenty of spare time, and will do as I promised. Poor child! how pale she is." Then, in an audible whisper, "No danger of her dying on my hands? The folks might hear of it, you know."

"No danger, no danger at all, madam. Your excellent society and plenty of good food are all she needs. You are sure the folks wouldn't object to this?"

"La, sir, I has my own liberty here, and my master is not one of the stingy sort. He allows me a companion for the summer, and I know of no one I'd sooner favor than a friend of yours."

"Thanks, Mrs. Hall. I'll speak about it to Mr. Atherton myself when I'm down to the Branch next week. I will see you rewarded also."

"I am sure I don't wish pay, sir, when I think of your past kindness. I haven't forgotten your services for my rheumatic fever last winter, when you wouldn't take a cent. I said to the cook then, says I—"

"Hush—don't mention it, Mrs. Hall. Good-day. I'll call to-morrow and see my patient."

All this was said in a darkened oak-lined library, where I lay upon an easy lounge, with closed eyes and tired brain. I only half realized that I was in an apartment and mansion of rare magnificence, but I was too weary to feel curiosity respecting my surroundings.

Later, I learned from garrulous Mrs. Hall, during cool mornings spent in the airy apartments facing the Park, that the owner of the house, a gentleman of extreme wealth, was spending the summer at the Branch, not to return until September, and that she, in the meantime, had full charge of the house and its appointments, and had also undertaken the direction of the few servants left in the almost-deserted mansion. She professed herself delighted with my society, for, to use her own words, "She was getting lonesome-like, and felt spooky of nights."

How strange this luxury seemed to me, after the poverty of my past life! the soft Axminster carpets, vast mirrors, luxurious upholstery, and rare works of art. How bitterly I mourned, as I realized my own miserable ignorance amid the numberless choice volumes lining the walls of Mr. Atherton's library!

One warm Sunday evening, while Mrs. Hall was taking her usual after-dinner nap, I stole down in the darkness to the large open windows of the drawing-room, there to watch listlessly the little life apparent in the streets below. I noted with idle interest a flirtation going on in the next

area between a smart chambermaid and a stern guardian of the law. How different my life had been from this serving-girl—how void of the little joys which creep into even the lives of the lower classes, as they are called. I felt such an alien, such a creature without a place in the wide world, that, overcome by a sense of my own loneliness, I leaned my head upon my hands, and gave way to my tears. Suddenly a strain of sweetest music broke the silence. It seemed to me a voice from God, chiding me for daring to doubt for even an instant his tender love and protection. Had he not wonderfully cared for me so far, and would he be likely to forsake me now?

I forgot to wonder at the nearness of the music, and only listened as a deep rich voice joined the chords, and the words of a simple hymn fell upon the air. It was music that I could understand, and almost unconsciously I hummed over the last words. A voice close to my side startled me.

"So you like my poor music? I am glad."

I started, to see in the room, quite close to my chair, the figure of a man, and arose with a nervous movement to depart.

"Pray be seated, Miss Freyer, I beg. I was thoughtless to come in unannounced. Allow me to introduce myself as Winthrop Atherton, at your service. I have already heard of you from Dr. Bently, and assure you of the pleasure I feel in welcoming you here. We shall be friends, I feel sure."

The voice, so courtly and gracious, gave me sudden self-possession. I took the hand extended to me in token of friendship.

"Thank you, Mr. Atherton, for your confidence in me. I am deeply grateful for this temporary home, and hope my stay has not seemed very intrusive to you. Believe me, I have been tempted many times to leave. It has seemed of late as if I must get back my strength, so that I could be at work again. Besides, these rich things—"

I paused, not knowing how to continue. I felt I might wound him should I speak my mind.

"Go on, child," he said, kindly; "what effect did you fear 'these rich things'"—with a comical mimicry of my manner—"would have upon your morals?"

"Now you are making fun of me, sir."

But I feared work would seem harder and more distasteful to me after the fairy life here, besides awakening ambitious dreams that it will be hard to silence when I get back."

I shuddered involuntarily, remembered suddenly that I was addressing an almost utter stranger, and turned to leave the room. Mr. Atherton followed me out into the lighted hall, and gave me a pleasant good-night as I turned upon the long stairs.

Where had I seen that kingly figure and haughty face before? I tried to think, in vain.

When I knelt beside my little bed that night, something dropped from between the leaves of my Bible. It was an old card, and on it were the words—

**"WINTHROP ATHERTON, BANKER,
"No. — Broadway, New York,"**

This was the key to the mystery. I was under the roof of the man my father had all but murdered that winter night; had been dependent upon him for my daily bread for nearly a month.

How I hated him during those first days when I felt a sickening feeling of dependence under his roof, and yet realized my utter inability to leave until my health and strength should return to me! I resented it that a man should possess a delicacy and refinement that I, in my fairest days, had only dreamed of. I admired him, and yet would not allow myself to be friendly. I felt a sense of pain, and a desire for a nobler and better existence, as I watched him day after day bending over some book in the library, or penning articles for some favorite magazine.

I taught myself sullen indifference and stolid aversion when I was with him, but only seemed to amuse him by my avoidance of his presence. One morning he stopped me on my way up stairs.

"Miss Freyer, can you spare me a few moments? I wish your opinion of this article."

I smiled satirically. As if I could understand or appreciate his feelings! It was only his kindness that prompted him to address me as an equal, I said to myself with bitterness in my heart.

"You overrate my powers, sir. I fear I would not prove a competent critic. Let me pass, please. Mrs. Hall is waiting for me."

"Allow me to be the judge of your abilities," fixing his laughing blue eyes full upon me. "Why do you avoid me so, Miss Freyer? We are like strangers under the same roof. Do you value my friendship so little?"

"Our positions are too far apart to talk of friendship, Mr. Atherton."

I forced myself to meet his gaze, but my cheeks flushed at what I read in his.

"Our positions? What do you mean? Nonsense! In this republican country such notions are absurd, child. The gulf is not impassable which separates us."

"O Mr. Atherton, I must speak upon a subject that has long troubled me. I think you misunderstand my position here. Our lives and thoughts are very far apart; the gulf that separates us very wide. I am not even a friend of Mrs. Hall, as you seem to imagine. I am a poor friendless girl, that, but for Dr. Bently's and your kindness, would now be dependent upon public charity."

"My kindness has nothing to do with it, nor have you been dependent upon me. Your face often wears a familiar look, and in vain have I striven to recall when and where I first met you."

He scanned my features long and earnestly, then a light of recognition beamed in his eyes.

"It is the face of the woman to whom I owe my life. All I could do, Elizabeth Freyer, would never repay you. You saved me from two villains that winter night."

"One was my father. Do not call him so, sir. He was drunk, and not himself, or he would never have done it."

"Poor child! He has deserted you, then, and you are all alone."

"He never deserted me!" I exclaimed, passionately. Then, with a burst of tears, "He is dead!"

"Forgive me, little one! I never guessed the truth. The past has bound us together. Tell me what you dislike me for, and let me try to please you."

I could not resist the frank winning smile and outstretched hand, and again we sealed the compact of a firm friendship for the future.

Why did I linger during those summer days in Winthrop Atherton's presence? Why did I allow soft persuasions and friendly words to get the better of my woman's nature, which urged me to throw off

my indolence and be up and doing? I know not. I only know that then, all unconsciously, I had found heaven in his presence, drew strength from his kindly eyes, and daily grew in health, as he brought rare exotics from the conservatory, loaded my plate with delicacies and rare fruits, and read aloud long mornings in the library from poet and historian hitherto unknown to me.

Good Mrs. Hall always played propriety upon these occasions, and formed one of the happy trio that gathered around the little round table in the almost deserted dining-room.

Mr. Atherton laughingly declared that we were playing country, and would have nothing but country dishes upon our table—golden pats of butter, luscious berries, Dutch cheese, delicate custards and bowls of cream. Then we had doughnuts, turnovers, flapjacks, and other old-fashioned dishes, all to suit the master's whim, who appeared to become a boy again in his enjoyment of life, and zest in the silly nothings which made up our days. Silly nothings to him, I say, but to me, hitherto starved in the beautiful things of this life, they seemed the Alpha and Omega of existence.

Surely I was living a dreamlife during those burning August days; those quiet mornings and moonlit evenings were like nothing I had ever known before—they could not be of the earth earthly.

He found me alone one morning, ready to start for a walk.

"Where away, Miss Freyer? Upon some mission of mercy?"

"No sir. I was going to the Park for a stroll. I have grown very selfish of late."

"To the Park! O, may I go, too?" Then, seeing the pleasure in my eyes I could not conceal, "You like to have me with you. Would it always be so, or, like other women, do you require constant change and excitement? You are so different from the girls I have met, Elizabeth."

He seemed to dwell upon my plain name. Never had it found favor in my eyes before.

"The sweetest woman ere drew breath
Is my dear wife Elizabeth,"

he paraphrased. "Could you be my dear wife, Lizzie? Dare I hope for the disinterested fond love of a noble true girl? Tell me, little one."

I could not answer. We had reached the Park, and he led me to a rustic seat.

Why dwell upon those moments? I proved no wiser or stronger than any other woman in love, and, in spite of the vast social gulf which I knew separated us, I listened to his tender words, and gave him the promise which he professed made him happy for life.

That was my heaven, and it lasted just one week.

Never had I doubted him for one instant since that morning when I gave him my love, with a mad worship which amounted almost to idolatry. I would willingly have died for him; and I often wondered why he had chosen me—me, a poor lowborn girl for his wife, among all the fine ladies he knew.

I say I had never doubted his truth. I loved him so entirely myself that I thought the very intensity of my love must of necessity win for me a return.

I was building airy castles of our future one morning, when Mrs. Hall entered the room, all flushed with haste.

"My lands! if this aint sudden, though. I am all frustrated-like, she gave me such a turn."

"What is the matter?"

I came down from my airy castles, and tried to affect an interest in her everyday affairs.

"Matter enough, to be sure. Miss Atherton's come home from the Branch, all unexpected, and Mr. Winthrop he let her in. The master looks as pale and scared-like as possible. He seemed dreadfully put out that she should come home, and has been urging her to finish the season at Saratogy. They had awful high words, as they always does, and she has got the hysterics now. O dear, dear!"

"Is she the sister of the master of the house?"

"Sister? Why, it's his wife, Miss Freyer. The Lord knows, I wish she wasn't, and he too, I guess. Such a haughty, hateful lady as she is, awfully highstrung. I fear she'll give you your walking papers. She doesn't know you've been here, and I've kept quiet to please Mr. Winthrop."

She had kept quiet to please Mr. Winthrop? I turned faint and sick, and tore the collar from my throat with both hands. I felt that I should strangle, and staggered to the open window for air.

He was in the street below, taking wraps and bags from the carriage. A fashionably dressed lady joined him, and said something in a high tone. He answered nothing, but there was a hard look upon his face I had never seen there before, as he took her by the arm and almost forced her up the steps.

His wife? And what was I? I, who had so readily given him my heart? I had been his dupe, to while away the idle hours of an idle summer. I was poor and friendless, and a proper person to amuse his lordship during his fashionable wife's absence at the Branch.

It was bitterly hard to bear. I had loved with my whole nature, and I was too untrained and untaught to rise above my pain. I waited until Mrs. Hall passed from the room, then packing my few things in my trunk, without a tear, I took shawl and hat, and stole quietly down stairs. I met Phœbe the chambermaid in the hall.

"Phœbe, I hear your mistress has returned, and Mrs. Hall no longer needs me. Can some one be spared to carry my trunk?"

Jim, Mr. Atherton's colored valet, volunteered his services, with the ready good-nature of his race.

I passed out of the vast house, into the streets, and sought refuge in a third-class boarding-house.

After that I grew hardened and desperate, and finally went back to my old lodgings and old life.

Of all beings I was most miserable. I might have known I was never meant for such as he, I told myself again and again with bitter self-contempt. He had crossed the gulf between us, and now, having recrossed it, it could never again be bridged over.

I tried to sweep away all vestige of the past, and turned my face resolutely against my lost happiness.

Once when I caught sight of him in the street, the dead past seemed to bloom again, and the happiness of those days awoke.

Stinging tears blinded me as I groped my way back to my miserable lodgings, and threw myself weeping upon my poor bed.

A rap at the door roused me in the midst of a paroxysm of tears. I hastily wiped my eyes, and opened the door. Then I hid

my face in my hands, and fell into the nearest chair.

"Lizzie, darling, I have found you, after these weary months of waiting. Why did you leave me alone and friendless? Why did you wrong me so?"

"Alone and friendless!" I cried, with a bitter laugh. I did not dare to look up and see his changed wasted face and sad eyes, or I felt every resolution would melt away. "Do you dare to accuse me of wronging you—you who have cursed my life, and almost made me mad? O, why did I not die that bitter winter night! Why was life spared to me, when I do not want it, and pray for death?"

He did not answer me in words. He knelt down on the bare floor beside me, and tried to raise my head with gentle force.

"Why do you wish for death, Lizzie? Is the love—the love, remember—you have often said would never fail me, entirely gone? What have I done that I should be hated by the only woman I have ever loved?"

I arose from my chair, and looked into his eyes, I declared to myself, for the last time.

"Where is your wife, Winthrop Atherton? Is she dead, that you dare to address me thus?"

"I have no wife, Lizzie, if she be not in this room."

"What then has become of Mrs. Atherton, under whose roof you dared to make love to me last summer? I was your dupe; but, thank God, I have crushed my heart and escaped. I must not listen to you longer. It may amuse you, but it will condemn me in the eyes of the world!"

He looked at me with wide-opened eyes, but did not approach me again. He paced the floor two or three times.

"I think I see it, Lizzie," he said, at length, pausing just in front of my chair. "I was careless never to have explained my true position to you before; but I never dreamed you could have misconstrued it. I am not the master of that house, Lizzie. It belongs to my elder brother Ralph. I was but a guest there, like yourself. Mrs. Atherton is far from being a good wife and mother. Her little ones are trained in fashionable boarding-schools, God help them, and her husband leads a life few men would envy. To be sure, he has his

wife's large wealth, added to half of my father's property, but I should vastly prefer a cottage with one I love. Look up, Lizzie, and tell me the old love is still mine. Tell me you trust and care for me a little. If you knew how I have hungered for a sight of your dear face all these weeks!"

It was all over then, the misery of my past, and the man I still loved better than my own life had been true through all. I need not now train myself to hate him. It was no sin to listen to the music of his voice, and dream of the happy days when

I should be all in all to him, as he was already to me.

The western sunlight streamed from behind the clouds into my attic room, and beautified the bare floor and poor furniture, as we sat there together.

Years have passed since, and those days seem now far, far distant; but I doubt if I can ever taste again the bliss of that evening spent amidst poverty and squallor, though now surrounded by the beauties and refinements of a home glorified by the love of a good husband.

"X" AND "H": A TELEGRAPH OPERATOR'S STORY.

BY FRED F. FOSTER.

I.

My temperament, as I am well aware, is very peculiar; in most things I am what might be termed an extremist. Persons and things which I like I am very fond of; and what I have a distaste to I hate from the bottom of my heart, if I may be permitted the use of so strong a term as "hate."

This characteristic renders life at once pleasant and disagreeable. Beautiful things almost fascinate me, making of earth a heaven; while repulsive things convert this heaven into something far different. Society, fortunately, is made up of such a variety of individuals, each possessing some trait peculiar to himself, that it furnishes a wonderful source of study,

and at the same time renders me happy and miserable. This is a long prelude to my story, but a necessary one, as will be perceived ere I am done.

"Born of poor but respectable parents," I was blessed with an excellent opportunity for study; and, devoting myself to my books, I, in a short time, accomplished what it would have taken most persons much longer to perform.

By the most earnest endeavor I was enabled to graduate from Harvard, with no little honor, I think I can say with entire freedom from egotism. Having graduated, I was offered a situation as correspondent for one of our popular journals, which suited me nicely, and which I at once accepted; inasmuch as I was to travel in and

write from Europe. In this way I could visit those time-hallowed places with which I had in a measure become acquainted through my long study of the classics; and certainly nothing can be more pleasing to one interested in the beauties of Homer and Virgil, the thrilling utterances of Demosthenes and Cicero, than a personal acquaintance with the places where they lived and died.

While in Venice I made the acquaintance of a gentleman named Simpson, from New York. He was a wealthy merchant, and was travelling with his family on account of the ill-health of his wife. The family was a very pleasant one, but the daughter, a young lady of about nineteen, interested me more than all the others.

I have said I was extremely fond of beautiful things; and among women Eva Simpson was the most beautiful I had ever met. Did I possess the faculty of description which novelists have, I would gladly paint her portrait in ink; as I have not, I will only say, picture to yourselves the most beautiful brunette you can imagine, of the medium height, and rather slim, and you will have a truer conception of her than I can give you. Words would fail me to do her justice. And her disposition was as charming as were her looks and ways. I was fascinated, withal, by the aptitude she manifested in the comprehension of things in general, which I noticed throughout the entire period we were intimately associated.

I was at this time only twenty-four, a susceptible period in a man's life; and, of course, in a few weeks I was deeply in love with her, on every possible occasion seeking her society, and superlatively miserable if a day passed and I did not meet her. Of course, with her beauty, wealth and intelligence, cavaliers by the score there were, only too glad to do homage at her shrine, among whom were gentlemen of means, who could give her such an "establishment" as she deserved, which I could not—having my own way to win, with no glory or property for me save what I gained by my unaided efforts.

As most poor people are, I was proud-spirited, and for a time was uncertain what to do under the circumstances; but "faint heart ne'er won fair lady," so one evening, as we were listlessly gliding along

in a gondola, the moonbeams casting dark shadows across the watery streets, I in impassioned words declared my love, and asked her to become my wife, stating my circumstances exactly as they were. She heard me through, and then said, quietly:

"Mr. Earl, that you are not rich would make no difference, so far as my love is concerned. And your candid confession of your love for me is very dear. There is no gentleman of my acquaintance whom I esteem more highly. I will not deny that I was aware that you esteemed me highly, for I knew my society was agreeable to you. I did not imagine you loved me so much, or I would have taken the means to prevent it. Not that your love is unpleasant to me; far from it. I only speak on your own account. I could love you, did I try, but that would be wrong, as I am, and have been for two years, engaged to a gentleman in Illinois. Rest assured," she continued, "your friendship will be as dear to me as ever. Nor can we, for want of the greater, afford to give up the less love, can we?" she said, with a smile.

I assented to this; and though friendship is not quite so dear to one in love as it may be to others, I rested satisfied, as no one was at fault for my disappointment save myself; and there was no little consolation in thinking, if she could never be mine, neither could any one of her other attendants, who were so zealous in their attentions, win her. In a few weeks I left Venice for other parts of Europe, and when I parted from her, she wished me the greatest prosperity, and invited me to call on her in her own home, when we had again reached our native land. So we were verily "the best of friends," as she said. We deemed it expedient not to enter into correspondence with each other; so, during the entire period which I passed in Europe, after leaving the City of the Sea, I never heard from her but once, and that through a gentleman whom I met in London, who was in Venice during my stay there, and whom I suspected of having also made proposals to Miss Eva Simpson, though I never knew it for certainty.

II.

ON returning to America, when I had completed my tour of observation, I was undecided to what I had best give my

attention as a vocation. Each of the professions seemed full to overflowing, and I could not endure the humiliation of occupying a second or third rate position in any of them. I was offered a situation as principal in a flourishing school, but did not consider my temperament compatible with the instruction of the young; and, besides, teaching was too monotonous, possessing too little excitement to suit my nervous disposition. I could have had a position on the editorial corps of the journal with which I had been indirectly connected for two years, but the life of a journalist is a hard one, not particularly remunerative, and offers but little chance for promotion.

While attending to my studies, the natural sciences had afforded me great pleasure; and no point in their entire realm was so fraught with interest and wonder as that of electricity. There was a certain incomprehensible something about it which won my closest attention; and though I never anticipated becoming a second Franklin, much as I could have desired such a result, I did long for a situation in which I would be enabled to study its hidden mysteries.

So, when my duties as correspondent ended, I devoted my time to the study of telegraphy; and after several months I sought and obtained a situation as operator in an office in Michigan. True, the salary was not large, but where is the person, interested in any subject, who allows merely pecuniary interests to interfere with the prosecution of his favorite pursuit?—especially if it is sufficiently remunerative to support him in a respectable manner. As with others, so it was with me; only by as much as my temperament was more active and nervous than is the disposition of the majority of people, so I was more zealous in my calling than are most persons who act as operators, and who only consider their occupation valuable in so far as their situation affords them a good subsistence in an easy manner.

Beside myself there were three operators in the office where I was located; but, ere many months, my earnestness was rewarded by promotion to manager, which being the highest position there attainable, I was for the present contented.

Medical men, by long acquaintance with disease and suffering, are said to lose in a great measure their sensitiveness; and the

same may be said of operators. Of course, matters of great importance only are submitted to transmission by telegraph; hence a large part of messages relate to sickness and death. I remember how I was affected when I first received a death-message; one announcing the decease of a young man, the only support of his widowed mother in her declining years. I knew the woman, and from my heart I pitied her; could hardly have felt worse had it been my own brother who was dead. But in time this wore away—my feeling of unhappiness on such occasions—and I came to consider all messages whatever merely in a business point of view.

One evening, after business hours, I was sitting in my office, making up reports, and at the same time enjoying a fine Havana, when a young man came in, and, without saying a word, quietly seated himself near the stove. He was a fine-looking gentleman, dressed very fashionably, yet in excellent taste, with no inclination to the "flashy." But there was a certain something in his countenance which did not exactly please me, though I paid but little attention to it or him—merely nodding as he entered, and then kept on about my business.

After a while, as he said nothing, I asked him if I could in any way accommodate him. In reply he said:

"I hope you will pardon me, but I used to telegraph myself; and being under the necessity of remaining in this town over night, where I am entirely unacquainted, I came in here, thinking, if you were not too busy, you would perhaps allow me the use of some of your keys in refreshing my knowledge of the subject. It is one in which I was greatly interested, but I have not had anything to do with it for several years."

Aware of my own interest in the subject, and presuming him an enthusiast like myself, I said:

"Certainly, sir; you are welcome to use any of these keys. This one is on the line between T. and F., and there being no night officers on that line, you can use it with no fear of breaking any one."

"Shall I not trouble you?"

"Not at all," said I. And the gentleman came inside the fence inclosing the operating-room from the rest of the office, and seating himself, commenced his writ-

ing. He was certainly a skillful operator, even surpassing myself in the rapidity with which he wrote. For a time he amused himself with making different letters and writing various sentences, and then he commenced rapidly calling "X," signing when he did so "H." There was no such "call" on the line, and I could not understand why he ran on that letter; but at last there came "i, i." "X."

I thought to myself, the gentleman is ahead of me here—evidently understands something which I do not; so, quite interested, though apparently absorbed in my own work, I paid the closest attention to his writing. Immediately, on having his "x" answered, he wrote:

"Rh revibgrmt zolzvob ull lkvizgrlm? H." And in a moment the reply came:

"Bo xlvn wldn glukild mrtsg. X."

After this the stranger kept on with his promiscuous writing, and when he was done, said:

"Thank you, sir, for your kindness. I find I have not entirely lost my knowledge of the art."

"You are welcome. No, you have not forgotten how to use the key, by any means, and once you must have been very skillful."

"Thanks for the compliment," said he, with a smile. "There was always something fascinating to me in telegraphing; so, when I was attending school, I fear I devoted more time to it than I ought—more than was consonant with success in other pursuits; at least, the professor used to advise me to give more attention to my studies generally."

"It is, indeed, a wonderful science," returned I; "and it is surprising that, being so valuable, it should so frequently be used for evil purposes." And as I said this, I fixed my gaze upon him closely.

"So it is," he replied, without a feature in his handsome face changing. "And the same is true of nearly everything," he continued. "The best things are often turned to the worst uses."

A short conversation ensued, and then he arose to depart, placing a card in my hand as he did so with the remark:

"I have neglected to introduce myself, but if you ever visit E—, I shall be pleased to entertain you. You will easily find my residence. Again thanks for your kindness, and good-evening."

I responded to him a "good-evening," and on looking at the card found the name CHARLES HAMPTON.

I knew I had heard the name before, but at first could not remember where; then like a flash it came to me. This was the name of Eva Simpson's betrothed, and there could be no mistaking the identity. She had told me E— was the place of residence of the Charles Hampton, and it was my visitor's home. Moreover, he (the stranger) was evidently a gentleman of wealth and culture. Two persons of the same name were possible; such a resemblance in other respects was far from probable. Were we then in some mysterious way to be connected?

For a long time I pondered upon the strange fate leading to this meeting, and then my mind reverted to the mysterious telegraphing. True, the letters sent and received were devoid of sense, but I was confident there was some meaning, if only it could be found.

By long practice an operator becomes as familiar with other operators' writing over the wires as with an individual's penmanship; but I could not locate "X's" writing. Possibly it might be some stranger in an office, as my visitor was. The thought struck me that mayhap I would be able to get him again. So I went to the key and called "X," signing "H," till I was tired. No response came; so if "X" was a regular operator on the line, he was not deceived by my calling.

Then I set my wit at work to decipher the senseless sentences, and found the key to the solution by transposing the alphabet; using z for a, y for b, etc. The letters thus transposed read as follows:

"Is everything all ready for operation?" And the reply was:

"Yes, come down to-morrow night."

I was now convinced something was up, even if Hampton did go down; but I could only await developments. I did not sleep much that night; and falling into a drowse, I was continually in trouble, of an indefinite kind, in which Eva, Hampton and myself were strangely mixed up.

I made no reference to the matter among the other operators in the office, for fear something would thereby result to entirely overthrow any plans I might form.

Two days subsequent to the occurrence a message from F. was received at our

office for a Mr. Kimball, well known as a detective. It was as follows:

"Bank robbed last evening. Come at once. Sig. President."

Mr. Kimball went down and remained several days, and on his return came into the telegraph office. I asked him as to his success, and he said:

"Positively I have had none. It is the most curious case I have ever known. The bank officers suspect no one, nor is there any one on whom the least suspicious thing can be fastened."

When he was through, I said:

"Excuse me, but I think I can work this case up for you."

"Do you, indeed?" asked Mr. Kimball.

"I do, assuredly," I returned.

"Have you had any experience as a detective?"

"Never."

"I should say this was a blind case for a novice."

"Doubtless it is; but I will tell you what I wish you would do. Take me down to F. and introduce me as one of your fraternity who, having heard of this case through yourself, desires to try and work it up. Will you do so, or does it seem too strange a freak to deserve a moment's consideration?"

"I confess, Mr. Earl, it appears freakish. Inasmuch as things can be no worse, I am willing to give you a chance to try what you can do, trusting you will exercise due caution."

"I will, indeed," said I. "Come in tomorrow morning, and I will go down with you; 'or no,'—I added. "You go down in the morning, and I will follow you in the P.M. That will prevent any suspicion that you have an 'accomplice.' I shall assume such a disguise that I hardly think you will recognize me. Please meet me at the M— House."

"I will do so," said Mr. Kimball; and he went away.

That afternoon I arranged my work so I could be absent several days. The season of the year was favorable, in that business was comparatively quiet, and my reports for the month were all made up.

III.

THE disguise I assumed the next day consisted of long heavy whiskers and mustache (my face was smooth), a wig of bushy hair (my own was straight), and a pair of plain-glass spectacles; and, going out on the street, I was not recognized by any of my friends.

Arriving at F., I went immediately to M— House, and as it was nearly time for tea, I took up a paper to look over, having registered my name as "*Henry Quimby, Chicago Ill.*"

While I was scanning the contents of the paper, Mr. Kimball came in, and, not finding my name on the register, turned away, evidently disappointed; then he came and sat down, only a short distance from me, watching the door very closely to see if I came in. I smiled to think how effectually I had deceived him, and said, in a whisper:

"So you didn't know me?"

He recognized my voice, and, turning to me, replied, quietly:

"I declare, you are transmogrified. I guess you'll do."

"I shall endeavor to," said I. "Have you been to the bank?" I added.

"Yes. I have arranged everything in that direction, and the president and cashier will call on you this evening, at your room. That will obviate observations by outsiders."

"That is a good idea," said I, "and now we will, hereafter, act as strangers."

Soon tea was announced, and I confess I was sufficiently hungry to relish my food that night. I was about to rise from the table, when who should come in but Charles Hampton, accompanied by a young man a few years his junior. Of course, Hampton could not penetrate my disguise, and I determined to remain at the table a while longer and watch. So I ordered another cup of tea and some more rolls, and taking a paper from my pocket, appeared to be very busy over its contents.

In no long time the table was deserted, save by us three, and I was confident something would now "turn up" to aid me, for I was persuaded Hampton was the rogue, though I had not much to found such an opinion on. But not one point did I make by my endeavor, for they quietly ate their supper, and as quietly went out from the dining-room, hardly making any

remarks during the entire meal. They had been gone from the table only a moment, when I also arose and went to the office and got a cigar. Hampton and his friend did likewise, and then left the house.

In the evening Kimball called and introduced the president and cashier of the bank. I found them very genial persons, glad that I was willing to aid them in a case which promised such uncertain results. The total loss was about \$60,000, including bonds, notes, papers, etc. The gentlemen thought the notes and papers, which could not with safety be disposed of, would be returned; in which case the loss would stand at a figure not far from \$40,000.

"By the way," said the president, "you will find Mr. Hampton willing to aid you in your work."

"Mr. Hampton?" I returned.

"Yes, Mr. Charles Hampton of E—, Ill. His father is president of the bank at that place, and he is the bookkeeper. His father is one of the directors of our bank, and of course, Mr. Charles is much interested in the affair."

"I presume his aid would be valuable, but I prefer to labor unaided, with your permission."

"Certainly, if you desire it," was the response.

"Thank you; and we will avoid being seen in company each of the other, or at least I will not visit you, till I have attained to some result, for fear the guilty ones, if in this vicinity, may become suspicious. You and the directors will, of course, discuss matters as quietly as possible; and, in a week, I trust to make a favorable report," said I.

"Your hopefulness gives me courage," said the cashier, and then I was left alone.

I confess I was working up the case in a peculiar manner, starting with the conclusion that Charles Hampton was the guilty party; my aim was to *prove* it. Somehow I must continue to have him become acquainted with *Henry Quimby*.

Fortune favored me; for, on the second evening of my stay in F., lounging into the billiard-room of the hotel, I found him cue in hand. Begging his pardon, I told him, if agreeable, I would like to play him a game. And we did play several, and I was gloriously beaten, as I expected to be. As making his acquaintance I was in-

troduced to his friend, Frank Powers, whom I found to be a clerk in the bank.

In my own mind I was confident I was gaining ground; as confident as I was that Charles Hampton and Frank Powers were the ones on whom the blow would fall. But first I must make an examination into circumstances, particularly those of Powers.

I found he was a steady respectable young man, respected, too, with no bad habits or small vices, such as are common to a place like F. An invalid father and a young sister were dependent on him, to whom he was thoroughly devoted; often sacrificing needed things to their comfort. The bank officials had the greatest confidence in him, as did every one of whom I indirectly made inquiries. I found, too, that he passed more or less of his leisure time in the telegraph office. This was worthy of notice.

Now I must learn more of Hampton, and for this purpose I went directly to E—. All I could learn in reference to him was decidedly in his favor, his reputation being excellent. He lived with his father, and was far from a spendthrift; considered rather close, taking into account his position and expectations. I confess I was at a loss, for I fully expected to find some weak point; not one was perceptible.

No I returned to F. a little discouraged. That evening, going into the reading-room I found Hampton writing a letter. He recognized me by a nod of the head; but on passing behind him, I found a letter, or rather an envelop, by his chair, directed to him, in one corner of which was printed, "Kentucky Grand Lottery." Here I was certain was another point; at any rate I determined to make a bold push, result as it might. So when I left the room, I told him I would like to have him call on me at my room, that evening, if convenient. He said he would, and a few moments after I went to my apartment, he came to my door, rapped, and was admitted.

After a few moments' conversation I observed:

"Mr. Hampton, you have not suspected it, but I am here in the capacity of a detective, to find the person or persons who committed the bank robbery."

"Are you? I really never *did* suspect it," said he. "Have you any clue to them?"

"I have more than a clue," said I. "I am certain I know the guilty ones."

"So sure as that?" asked he, smiling.

"Yes sir," said I; "and," looking him in the face, "*you and Powers are the persons.*"

"I?" he returned, while his lip trembled visibly. "I?"

"Yes, *you*, Charles Hampton. You may as well confess all, for I have proof in abundance."

I never saw any one more dumfounded than was he; and, in a little time, he did confess all, even to the smallest point. I will not go into detail, but merely say, he and Powers had both invested largely in lottery schemes, from which they had never realized anything, and also in stocks, of less value than the paper required to transact the business. He had never been dissipated, but was desirous to become rich, that he might enjoy more luxuries. He completely exonerated Powers from any guilt, further than he himself instigated.

He said the robbery was easy to accomplish, inasmuch as Powers had a mirror in front of him, whereby he could notice the various numbers used about the combination locks.

"But," said he, "how came you to suspect me?"

Removing my wig, whiskers and glasses, I said, "Do you recognize me, now?"

"You are the telegraph operator at L—."

"And your telegraphing was what convicted you. When you were writing I noticed you called *X* several times. There is no such call on the line, and when it was answered I was surprised; so I took your message and the answer, and studied them out, and was convinced something was wrong;" and then I told him about the envelop, etc., till he understood the entire matter as well as I.

"It is all up with me, so far as secrecy is concerned," said he. "But can I not compromise with you? If it becomes public Frank is ruined, and I consider him innocent, though possibly you may not. And, honestly, I know a lady whose heart would be broken by my wickedness becoming known to her. I deserve punishment,

but I have a regard for the feelings of others. Provided I return the entire amount taken, and enough more to pay all expenses, with a satisfactory sum to settle with you, will you endeavor to arrange the affair without publicity?"

"I do not know as it is right to do as you desire, but I will see what can be done. I trust there is no need of placing you under arrest?" said I.

"I claim to be a gentleman in spite of this error," he returned, his eyes flashing. "And what good would it do me to attempt to run away?"

"You are right. Excuse me for harboring any suspicions, even for an instant," said I. "Please call on me to-morrow, at eleven."

"I will do so," said he, and left the room.

In the morning I called on the bank officials, and informed them of my success, but mentioned no names.

"And," said I, "I restore your property to you. Will you grant me the favor not to ask who the guilty ones are, and to permit them to go unpunished, and that they even go without any further consideration? This is their first, and I know it will be their last, offence. Besides, their punishment will seriously affect many innocent persons."

They thought it was a peculiar way to do business, especially of such a kind, and, for a long time, were uncertain how to act; but, influenced by my arguments and the good I had done, they finally assented to my wishes; and a mystery always attached to the affair in the minds of every one save of us three. Charles Hampton is now my warmest friend, and Frank Powers is himself a bank president.

No! I did not marry Eva Simpson, but Charles Hampton did take her as a wife, nor do I know that his one misdeed rendered him any less worthy to be her husband. He knows of my once love for her, nor does he wonder at it, loving her so much himself. He made up for depriving me of Eva by giving me his own sister, whom all confess a charming woman.

May all operators be as successful as I was, is my best wish.